

HORROR FILMS OF THE 1970s



JOHN KENNETH MUIR

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On the cover: *It's Alive* (1973)

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For Ken and Loretta,
who took me to the drive-in to see *Boggy Creek*
and have encouraged me always.

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Introduction

We've all heard the axiom that "art imitates life," and most of us have a pretty good idea what it signifies. *Art does not exist in a vacuum*. Instead, it is inexorably bound to the time period from which it sprang. Sometimes an insight into a social or historical context in a work of art is entirely coincidental, arising from a set of understandings unknown even to the artist who rendered it. But more often than not there is *intent* in art to reflect, compare, reveal, contrast or echo some important element of the creator's universe.

Another truism, one hoisted from the darker side of the aesthetic shelf, might offer an ancillary proclamation. Specifically, horror films have always mirrored the fears and anxieties of their "real life" epochs.

In the 1930s, protean genre films such as *Dracula* (1931) and *King Kong* (1933) represented a form of "escapism" for adventure-hungry and romance-starved audiences seeking to forget the daily drags and vicissitudes of the Great Depression. Likewise, 1950s era horror gems such as *Them!* (1955), which concerned radiation-spawned giant ants, played on the not-so-hidden fears of the American audience that its own government had opened up a deadly Pandora's box by splitting the atom. In the same era, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) was viewed by many prominent critics as a thinly veiled indictment of Communism, a particularly timely target considering the pitch of the Cold War with America's competitor, the Soviet Union, and the rampant paranoia of the McCarthy age.

Not surprisingly, the same paradigm proves true for yet another decade of the turbulent twentieth century: the "freewheeling" 1970s. The myriad horror films of the disco era likewise represent a catalog of that time's mortal dreads and anxieties. Perhaps the only real significant difference between the 1930s or 1950s and the 1970s, however, is the sheer number of fears and apprehensions being evinced by the horror films of the period. Bluntly expressed, there was a lot more to be afraid about in the seventies.

Consider that the decade found people, and especially Americans, anxious about virtually every aspect of contemporary life. What was to be a woman's role in American society during the post-hippie, women's lib, bicentennial world? *The Stepford Wives* (1975) offered one nightmarish answer. What was to be the up-shot of all the random violence in the streets, and the worst crime rates in recorded American history? Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) had a few thoughts about that subject. Could the average citizen's inadvertent exposure to microwave ovens, industrial pollution, X-rays, a weakening ozone layer, or contaminated water alter the fundamental shape and evolution of human life? Larry Cohen's *It's Alive* (1973) explored that frightening notion.

Similarly, Robert Wise's *The Andromeda Strain* (1971) and Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1972) fretted that man's escalating reliance on machines might prove his undoing. At the same time, *Frogs* (1972), *Night of the Lepus* (1972), *Squirm* (1976), *Day of the Animals* (1977), *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977), *Empire of the Ants* (1977), *The Swarm* (1978), *Prophecy* (1979) and other '70s horror films about rampaging animals traded on different fears. Beneath the hokey special effects, these films reflected genuine audience trepidation that Mother Nature would not stand for man's continued pillaging and pollution of the Earth. These "eco-horrors" envisioned environmental apocalypse caused by humankind's own shortsightedness.

Even the innocence of the old *King Kong* was flipped on its head in the mid-1970s. The big-budget (and much loathed) 1976 remake of the 1930s classic found an American oil corporation (a surrogate for Exxon) exploiting Kong, like some natural resource, on a mission not of unbridled adventure and awesome exploration, but of imperialism and cynicism. Kong's new bride in the 1970s version was no innocent, either, but a struggling, opportunistic actress looking to find her fifteen minutes of fame.

And it didn't stop there.

The Watergate scandal and President Nixon's impeachment erupted in the early 1970s, and so the long-standing American pillar of "trust in government" soon crumbled to dust too. Consequently, horror films began to posit "evil" conspiracies at all levels of

governmental bureaucracy. The town elders of Amity kept the beaches open in *Jaws* (1975) even though they knew a killer shark was prowling the waters off their coast. The doctors and politicians of *Coma* (1978) were responsible for a vast conspiracy exploiting the weak and rewarding only the rich and powerful. The presidential candidate of *The Clonus Horror* (1979) utilized living human clones as a bank of replacement body parts, and organized a cover-up to keep it under wraps ... all the while playing the public role of “populist.” Ron Rosenbaum succinctly described the national mood in *Harpers Magazine* in September of 1979:

Horror is here with us again. Even the White House has been haunted, as witness the rhetoric of Watergate; Alexander Haig’s “sinister outside force,” John Mitchell’s “White House horrors,” Howard Hunt’s night-stalking “spooks,” a secret list of illegal campaign contributions maintained by the President’s secretary and known as “Rosemary’s Baby”; a cover-up, of course, is a premature burial, impeachment an exorcism¹.

If political machinations were a major concern in the 1970s, then the widening divide between races was another. Accordingly “old,” silver screen menaces such as Dracula and the Frankenstein monster were re-imagined during this decade as relevant “ethnic” ghouls in films with titles like *Blacula* (1972), *Scream Blacula Scream* (1973), *Blood Couple* (1973) *Blackenstein* (1973), *Black Werewolf* (1974), and *J.D.’s Revenge* (1976). The trend was quickly dubbed “blaxploitation,” an unholy integration of the words “black” and “exploitation,” and the sub-genre could not have been more aptly named. At the same time that white America was recognizing the economic potential of the black community at the box office, it also was selling the same community films that cast men of color as “monsters.” And—to gain the community’s sympathy (and ticket money)—Hollywood depicted these “villains” as being manipulated by a malevolent force known simply as the “Man.” Hence heroic (and black) Rosey Grier became a misshapen monster when white Ray Milland’s head was attached to his body in *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972), and so forth.

A deep-seated fear of “ethnicism” on the part of white America also

played out in other major horror films, such as *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1971), which saw Shirley MacLaine and her lily-white family implicitly “threatened” by the tenets of Puerto Rican faith and community.

The list of 1970s pre-occupations could go on for pages. Environmental, technological, sexual, governmental and ethnic fears all resulted in a slew of horror “mini-trends” in the 1970s. For instance, *Deliverance* (1972) and *Straw Dogs* (1971) orbited about a fundamental question: what does it mean to be “a man” in the eighth decade of the twentieth century? Remember, the 1970s were the dawn of Alan Alda, and the new age of “sensitive men,” and these films might be viewed as a response to the developing expectation that men eschew “machismo” and “express” their emotions instead.

Seventies films such as *Frenzy* (1972), *The Last House on the Left* (1972), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1973), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) were also more explicit, and far more intense, than previous horror productions had been. This was the result of the “new freedom” in cinema to freely depict graphic violence and bloodletting, and a shift to the paradigm of existential “realism” over the romantic “supernatural.” These films are representative of what horror historians term “savage cinema,” and they are wholly unique to the 1970s.

And what was to be the cumulative effect of so much intense questioning and fear about so many important topics, as well as such straight-faced glimpses of random violence (influenced, no doubt, by TV news footage of the Vietnam conflict)? Well, the fear shaped a decade filled with President Bush’s (Sr.) so-called “malaise days.” The president was referring specifically to the economy and American confidence when he coined that memorable phrase, but he might as well have been talking about the general anxiety that swept the nation before the dawning of the “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” yuppified 1980s.

One direct result of the anxiety-ridden 1970s was a retreat from the issues. After the sexual and drug revolutions of the late ’60s and early ’70s, many Americans were left feeling empty, de-valued and bereft of the moral values that had comforted previous generations.

Accordingly, some people retreated to religion, to the Christian values that had guided life in the United States for generations. But this was, lest we forget, the 1970s, not the 1950s. Many well-educated American citizens found they simply couldn't go home again; that the old ideas of good and evil, black and white, and absolutes simply didn't stand up to scrutiny in the wake of new discoveries about evolution, genetics and history. Religion was no longer the shelter some imagined.

Seizing on this spiritual doubt and vulnerability was another blockbuster movie trend of the 1970s, the religious horror film. *The Exorcist* (1973), *Beyond the Door* (1975), *The Omen* (1976), *The Sentinel* (1977), *Damien—Omen II* (1978) and many, many more found stark terror in the concept that the Devil was real, and that mankind's eternal soul was in jeopardy from demonic possession and the Antichrist, among other iconic bogeyman. Religious authorities should have been delighted that Hollywood was re-opening the debate about good versus evil, but most evangelicals were appalled by these films because they suggested that the Church was corrupt, and the Devil unbeatable. *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970), *Asylum of Satan* (1971), *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Daughters of Satan* (1972), *The Devil's Rain* (1975), *A Touch of Satan* (1973), *Race with the Devil* (1975), *Lisa and the Devil* (1975), *The Omen* (1976), *Damien—Omen II* (1978) and other "Devil" films culminated in stalemates, or with evil forces out and out victorious. That result—in the eyes of some—was akin to heresy.

Billy Graham, for one, railed against *The Exorcist*, claiming that William Friedkin's film was responsible for real-life instances of demonic possession, and Paul Leggett wrote the following in *Christianity Today*:

The devil, it seems is upon us. That is, if the mass media is to be believed.... While we should criticize the current excesses of the Gothic film, we should also heed its warnings. These films may only be reflecting our present moral climate. Why has the triumph of evil apparently become a resounding symbol of our time?... Part of the answer lies with the incessant accounts of war, corruption, and torture that seem to be destined to dominate the news

for the remainder of this century².

In other words, a godless people—or even a questioning people—get the godless films they deserve. Art imitates life. Again.

Interestingly, all the debating and doubting about spirituality had another side-effect on '70s horror cinema. Those who could no longer find adequate comfort in a Catholic structure to the universe were treated to another sub-genre of horror flicks: the non-explanation genre picture. Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) highlighted a wondrous mystery, a disappearance of several schoolgirls in the rugged Australian wilderness, which could never be solved in satisfactory "human" terms. In this case, law enforcement, science, and even reason could not solve the mystery, let alone explain it.

Similarly John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) showcased a villain, Michael Myers, who could not be diagnosed, contained, stopped, killed or likewise explained or understood. It seems fair to argue, then, that in the seventies, people were so frightened about the future that they began to sense that there were *no answers* out there in the universe to be had at all. Hence this brand of horror film.

Why were people so worried in the 1970s that their horror films reflected not one or two, but this whole multitude of uncertainties? The answers are many. Some writers, including the Irish poet Johnny Byrne, have called the 1970s the "wake-up" after the hippie dream. Look at how David Frum, author of *How We Got Here: The 70's—The Decade That Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse)*, described the time:

They were strange feverish years, the 1970s. They were a time of unease and despair, punctuated by disaster. The murder of athletes at the 1972 Olympic games. Desert emirates cutting off America's oil. Military humiliation in Indochina. Criminals taking control of America's streets. The dollar plunging in value. Marriages collapsing. Drugs for sale in every high school. A president toppled from office. The worst economic slump since the great Depression, followed four years later by the second-worst slump since the Depression. The U.S. Government baffled as

its diplomats are taken hostage. And in the background loomed still wilder and stranger alarms and panics. The ice age was returning. Killer bees were swarming up across the Rio Grande. The world was running out of natural resources. Kahoutek's comet was hurtling toward the planet. Epidemic swine flu would carry off millions of elderly people...3.

That's quite a list of bugaboos, and it is important to remember that Frum is a cultural warrior as well as a historian, a Reagan revolutionary and ardent conservative of the highest stripe. Still, his reading of the time period is not so skewed (though he fails to mention the good aspects of the decade).

In fact, if one were looking objectively at the time, one might be tempted to write of the 1970s as the best of times *and* the worst of times. Though America celebrated its bicentennial birthday and flew high with the Apollo space program, it also faced the many deep-seated concerns listed above. The Vietnam War, the energy crisis, double-digit inflation, and the hostage situation in Iran were just a few of the disturbing news stories.

Importantly, the decade also began with a dearth (and the deaths) of principled leadership, following the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. These figures of greatness seemed to be replaced, strangely enough, by "celebrity" monsters like mad-dog Charles Manson, the insane Son of Sam, the thuggish Gordon Liddy, and powerful corruption personified, Richard Nixon. It was a decade of controversy about everything from a woman's role in American society (remember the E.R.A.?) to her right to control her own body. This was the decade, after all, that *Roe vs. Wade* became, in the words of Attorney General John Ashcroft, "the settled law of the land." All of these events played out in the horror films of the day. Again and again, we can see cause and effect; life influencing art; art reflecting life.

Basically, the world just looked a lot less certain in the 1970s than it had in the idealistic '60s, when many young Americans in college felt they could make a difference in the process, and genuinely contribute to a climate of "world peace." At home, Johnson's "Great Society" promised an end to poverty and civil inequalities ... but

welfare didn't seem to help, and poverty didn't go away either. So the seventies were the end of many great dreams, a time of deep questioning and uncertainties, before America moved on to something else (the accumulation of wealth and the dependence again on traditional religious values in the Reagan '80s). The seventies were a decade of pause, of introspection. At least that is one good thing that can be said of the seventies, that these issues were being explored, not repressed or swept under the carpet. People were afraid of change, yes, but they were introspective too, willing to look into themselves and to the facts of life that seemed so scary. Horror directors, especially, took advantage of this time of doubt. As director of the documentary *The American Nightmare*, Adam Simon, has noted of horror's capacity to comment on society:

Horror as a genre, when it's done honestly, when it's done with serious intent, will naturally be open to the traumas of the world in ways that other genres aren't and can't be. Somehow by being focused on what disturbs us, especially if it's being done by somebody who's sort of determined to search their own soul for what's disturbing ... then it will naturally convey truths—universal ones, or at least national ones⁴.

Looking back at those years between 1970 and 1979, one can detect it is the extended moment between utter idealism (the '60s) and utter conservative retrenchment (the '80s) in American history, the moment between the Peace Corps mentality and the yuppie mentality. As a nation, American went from being a country that wanted to help the world to a country whose populace wanted better stock options. The seventies are the bridge between those disparate mind-states, and the decade's many clever horror films capitalized on the looming sense of transition to highlight the national and universal truths Simon writes about. The old notions of patriotism, trust in government, trust in science, trust in technology, and trust in law enforcement, were evaporating ... and that left audiences disturbed and unsettled. Their entertainment looked much the same way, at least in the horror genre (and particularly pre-*Star Wars* [1977]).



Horror movies of the 1970s can be divided into two categories: those that starred Peter Cushing (pictured here in *Curse of Frankenstein* [1957]), and those that didn't.

In much less high-minded terms, horror films of the 1970s can be split into distinct categories: those that star British Peter Cushing (1913–1994) and those that don't. Seriously, this gentlemanly actor was in more horror films than any man in history ... and the world

is probably better for it, since his screen presence is one of dignity and restraint, two factors not always found in the horror genre. As much as Nixon, the Devil and Vietnam are responsible for the look and feel of horror cinema, so, perhaps, is Peter Cushing, a true icon of the genre. Whether the villainous Dr. Frankenstein or the heroic vampire killer, Van Helsing, Cushing left an indelible mark on a genre he helped to redefine.

But beyond the joke about the ubiquitous Peter Cushing, this text is designed to categorize and review, often at length, many of the most interesting, meaningful and bizarre horror films that were produced in the 1970s, and note why they are special to their time period. Though the focus is generally on American films, this text also charts representative horror films from other countries, especially those that found favor in theaters on U.S. shores. In this regard, England is surely the undisputed champion of horror production in the 1970s, and Hammer Studios and Amicus both contributed many fine genre works during this, their twilight decade. In Italy, artists like Mario Bava and Dario Argento were toiling to re-invent the look and feel of horror (usually with a lot of the red stuff...), and in Australia directors such as Peter Weir and Richard Franklin were adopting the same mission. Canada, the home of David Cronenberg, is represented here as well, as are some unique works from Spain and Germany.

There will no doubt be some readers who flip through the pages of this book and ask why every single horror movie in the world made between 1970 and 1979 is not included. The problem is, simply, that some seventies horrors films have never been released on the home video market, are not currently available, or have disappeared from the face of the Earth all together. The author has endeavored to be as complete as possible in tracking down “signature” horror films of the 1970s, but there are no doubt other genre jewels out there in video store clearance bins, just waiting to be re-discovered and re-evaluated. This book is a beginning point for researchers, but no doubt the last word on the subject has yet to be written.

So let's boogie...

I

The History of the Decade (in Brief...)

What a decade it was! Unlike the paranoid 1950s, or the conformist 1980s (a decade in which a new slasher movie seemed to arrive in theaters every week), the 1970s represented a truly eclectic time in the annals of horror cinema. This was a reflection, perhaps, of how life was growing more complex in the '70s, with competing problems tugging audiences towards different dreads.

Some horror pictures of the 1970s were revolutionary, based on the fresh precepts of a freer, more personal cinema (which also gave rise to films like *Easy Rider* [1969]). Other horrors were merely old hat: toothless resurrections and variations on monsters who had appeared on the silver screen, in one form or another, since the 1930s and 1940s. What a decade, and what a mixed bag of tricks and treats.

Hammer Time

England's Hammer Studios had been in operation since 1935 (founded by Enrique Carreras and Will "Hammer" Hinds), but its reputation as a horror studio of the highest caliber wasn't cemented until the late 1950s. *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), starring Peter Cushing, and *The Horror of Dracula*, starring Christopher Lee, became unexpected hits in England and abroad as the Eisenhower era wound down. Shepherded by Sir James Carreras (1909–1990), Hammer Studios' "niche" in the horror market was soon pinpointed: colorful period horror films drenched in garish red blood and populated by scantily clad, buxom women. The studio's films also countenanced top-quality production values, so it was no surprise when Hammer quickly became a world leader in the genre and

remained perched there throughout the 1960s. Good sets, pioneering special effects, likable actors, gorgeous women and technicolor blood made for fun, chilling viewing.

Throughout the late fifties and early '60s, Hammer Studios unveiled a barrage of sequels to its popular *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* films. Titles included *Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), *Brides of Dracula* (1960), *Dracula—Prince of Darkness* (1966), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1966), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (1968) and *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1969). But, as is so often the case when sequels are involved, this was an instance of genre franchises going to the well once (or several times...) too often.

By the advent of the 1970s, the British Hammer films were showing the warning signs of age, and some serious quality slippage. James Carreras retired from the entertainment industry in 1972, and Michael Carreras, grandson of Enrique, reigned as studio head. By now, the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* series were growing long in the tooth, well over a dozen years old. The recipe for continued profitability? *New blood*.

To re-invigorate their profitable “monster” lines, Hammer went to extraordinary lengths to “re-vamp” them, particularly its leading franchise, *Dracula*. *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972) brought the vampire (once again portrayed by imposing Christopher Lee) into the swinging seventies to menace a group of “mod” teenagers. The film, directed by Alan Gibson, had some fine moments of comedy and wit, but never overcame the big disappointment that Dracula didn't get to interact with his new locale (and time period). Though surrounded by beauties like Caroline Munro, the vampire never escaped a ruined church to find himself in “hip” London, surely a grave miscalculation in the screenplay. Still, the film was not without merit, and Peter Cushing was back as a descendant of Van Helsing, while his granddaughter was portrayed by fetching Stephanie Beacham.

The next entry in the franchise was probably the worst of the long-lived saga. *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973) transformed the Transylvanian count into the corporate head of a 20th century business venture. Dracula's plan for apocalypse involved the unleashing of a new bubonic plague on mankind. The film, again

directed by Gibson, broke from Hammer tradition by introducing a “speaking” Dracula. In previous entries Lee had remained a hulking, hissing, but mostly silent, presence of darkness.

Neither of these '70s *Dracula* films were well-regarded by series fans, or particularly successful at the box office, and a dissatisfied Christopher Lee retired from the role that had made him a celebrity. The last Hammer *Dracula* film of the decade, *The Legend of 7 Golden Vampires* (1974), recast Dracula as the less-than-charismatic John Forbes-Robinson. And, taking the franchise further from its horror roots, the movie was a Chinese co-production, a “martial arts” vampire film packed with wall-to-wall karate moves and kung-fu fighting. Peter Cushing returned as Van Helsing (a welcome constant in the series...), and the film was quite an entertaining one, an improvement over *Satanic Rites*. Unfortunately, *Legend* was cut badly for distribution in the United States and received only limited release on this side of the Atlantic. It was even re-titled as *The Seven Brothers Meet Dracula*.

Hammer's *Dracula* series, horror trendsetter in the late '50s and the '60s, had come to smack of desperation in the seventies. The central conceit of *Dracula A.D. 1972* (vampire dwelling in contemporary society) had already been done in the States as *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970). *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* smelled like a bad James Bond film, or an episode of the British television series *The Avengers* (1961–68), and *Legend of 7 Golden Vampires* hopped willy-nilly on the kung-fu bandwagon popularized by star Bruce Lee. All the abrupt format shifts represented an inauspicious close to a franchise that had once seemed immortal.

Hammer's *Frankenstein* series showed far fewer overt signs of stress and slippage in the 1970s. Rather than casting aimlessly about for new formats to co-opt and popular film trends to emulate, the series remained faithful to its source material, while endlessly recycling the same plot. Invariably, mad Dr. Frankenstein (usually Peter Cushing) created a monster (either through stitching body parts, or in the case of *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* [1970], through brain transplants...). The monster then wreaked havoc, was consequently destroyed, and Frankenstein himself was killed ... only to pop up again in yet another sequel. As the decade wore on, the plots of the

Frankenstein films grew increasingly farfetched and repetitive even though Cushing's performances never lost their luster. In *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed*, the good doctor added rape to his list of atrocities, but beyond that kinky addition to the mix, this was another once-proud Hammer franchise in dire need of life-support.

Thanks to more intense horror films such as George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), the stately, even dignified films of Hammer Studios began to look old and out of date as the decade developed. Audiences of the 1970s hungered for something new and different, something that would more accurately echo their turbulent times, and Hammer was clearly in a rut. How many times could Dracula and Frankenstein be killed, and then revived? The resurrections were growing increasingly ludicrous, along with the narratives. In *Scars of Dracula* (1970), for instance, a bat swooped into the Transylvania castle and, with pinpoint precision, dripped blood onto Dracula's ashes to revive the ghoul ... a strangely convenient and contrived opening. The climaxes too, began to suffer from creative fatigue. By the time of Lee's final Hammer Drac film (*Satanic Rites*), Dracula had been electrocuted, impaled, killed by running water, destroyed by the sun, and (in the most silly climax of all), chased into a thorny thicket(!?). Many of these bizarre sequences were beautifully orchestrated by British special effects magician Les Bowie, but the situations themselves were completely ludicrous.

In search of things new and different, Hammer Studios soon seized on a brilliant and timely notion: greater titillation. In the late '60s and early '70s, films of all genres were revealing increased glimpses of frontal nudity. Hammer thus subtracted the flowing diaphanous gowns from its formula and added some tasteful, implied lesbianism to go with the ramped-up nudity. In 1970, Hammer spawned a new horror franchise based on Sheridan Le Fanu's (1814–1873) novella *Carmilla*, which had originally been published in 1872. This story of a female vampire had been lensed on film before (Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* [1960]), but Hammer played up the lesbian and nudity angles, and in the process made a star of its lead vampire, the luscious Ingrid Pitt. After Pitt's entry in the series, *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), less charismatic leading ladies (like the cross-eyed

Yutte Stensgaard) appeared in the Carmilla follow-ups *Lust for a Vampire* (1970) and *Twins of Evil* (1971). Invariably set at girls' schools with plenty of healthy female pulchritude abounding, these films recycled the vampire lore of the Dracula pictures while simultaneously offering plenty of opportunities for sensual massages, skinny-dipping and the like. Not that there's anything wrong with that...

On a far less prurient level, Hammer also began to experiment in the 1970s with some more adult, serious horror. *Demons of the Mind* (1972) and *Hands of the Ripper* (1971) were more gritty horror films about "monstrous" family legacies. In the former, an aristocratic family was cursed with madness and incest by a depraved patriarch, and in the latter, Jack the Ripper's daughter inherited her father's penchant for spilling blood. Both of these films played up psychology rather than blood and guts, and took a distinctly less romantic approach to the horrific material. Other films of the decade, including the psychological thriller *Fear in the Night* (1973) with Judy Geeson and Joan Collins, and *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976) starring Richard Widmark, failed to revitalize Hammer Studios. Coupled with the problems of the British film industry, and country-wide power outages, the studio collapsed into ruin before being resurrected in the 1980s as a purveyor of terror television.

Today, Hammer films boast a large cult following, and are generally very highly regarded among the genre faithful. Rumors have been flying about for years that remakes of Hammer's great horrors are on the way, though as of this writing, none have yet appeared. At the risk of alienating a very large and very vocal fan base, it seems fair to state that Hammer's best days were in the late '50s and early '60s, and that some of its 1970s productions feel like re-hashes from the Studio's glory days. By the same token, Hammer's desperation in the '70s resulted in some fine experimentation, and the Carmilla films are light, fun and erotic ones, while *Demons of the Mind* and *The Hands of the Ripper* are exceedingly interesting and valuable works that probably deserve greater recognition than the *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* sequels of the '70s.

Amicus Briefs

If Hammer faced a challenge cornering the largest share of the horror market in the early 1970s, it was no doubt because competition was springing up everywhere, on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, AIP (American International Pictures) and Samuel J. Arkoff were cranking out horror films left and right, and in Great Britain, Hammer found itself vying for superiority with Amicus, a studio formed by two American producers, Milton Subotsky (1921–1991) and Max J. Rosenberg, in the mid 1960s. Adding insult to injury, Amicus conscripted some of Hammer's biggest talent, including the ubiquitous Peter Cushing, for their adventures in the macabre.

Differentiating itself from Hammer, Amicus concentrated (in the '70s) on a series of droll horror anthologies. *Tales from the Crypt* (1972) and its sequel *Vault of Horror* (1973) were based on the popular American comic books published by Bill Gaines and E.C. comics, and the films adapted several stories straight from that source. In *Tales from the Crypt*, Joan Collins faced a diabolical Santa Claus in "And All Through The House," but the stand-out "episode" of the film was its climax, "Blind Alleys," which saw a cruel administrator forced to navigate a narrow corridor lined with razor blades. After viewing the HBO series of *Tales from the Crypt* in the late '80s and early '90s, with its animated puppet Cryptkeeper, it's something of a shock to look back at Amicus's *Crypt*, which puts dignified Ralph Richardson in the role of the decaying "creep."

Asylum (1972) was another Amicus anthology, this time of stories penned by horror legend Robert "Psycho" Bloch. Herbert Lom, Barry Morse, Britt Ekland, Peter Cushing (again!) and Barbara Parkins were among the inmates who had gruesome—and horrifying—stories to recount. The anthology *From Beyond the Grave* (1973), directed by Kevin Connor, featured more ghoulish "shorts," this time revolving around a devilish antique store run by, *guess who*—Peter Cushing. Before Amicus was done, Donald Pleasence, Ian Hendry, Joan Collins, Herbert Lom, Jon Pertwee, Ingrid Pitt, and other genre veterans populated their films, which were inevitably of good humor, and somewhat lighter than the dour Hammer offerings.

In the non-anthology category, Amicus also had (in a venture with AIP) what was probably the coup of the decade. It cast Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and Christopher Lee in *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), a macabre film about body part replacements and strange surgeries. Though the film was somewhat muddled and the three actors never actually shared a scene together, having these three popular horror stars in one film was a major marquee attraction of the decade.



Britain's Amicus Films released a number of horror anthologies in the 1970s, including *The House That Dripped Blood* (1972), starring Jon Pertwee (pictured).

By the mid 1970s, Amicus had sidestepped out of horror with adaptations of Edgar Rice Burroughs' adventures (*The Land That Time Forgot* [1974], *At the Earth's Core* [1976]), and *The People That Time Forgot* [1977], all directed by Kevin Connor). Though these films were quite successful in America, Amicus folded in late 1977 when producers Rosenberg and Subotsky parted company. Subotsky continued to be a voice in American horror films in the 1980s, but his name may forever be associated with Amicus (and with the two

AARU *Doctor Who* feature films he produced in the late '60s).

Frankenstein and Dracula (Unbound)

In the 1970s, Hammer wasn't the only studio attempting to breathe life into the old monsters that had proven so successful at scaring audiences in the 1930s and 1940s. American International Pictures and Samuel Z. Arkoff were also intent on seeing these legends re-born, and milking their potential for box office. To that end, AIP released a plethora of horror films that reinterpreted the monsters of yesteryear with new, sometimes quite odd, twists.

Blacula (1972) was part of the seventies trend of "blaxploitation," the re-casting of famous "white" ghouls as black icons instead. Starring William Marshall, *Blacula* was the tale of a regal African prince "enslaved" by Count Dracula during a diplomatic visit to Transylvania (designed, incidentally, to curb the slave trade...). After centuries locked away in his coffin, the vampirized Blacula was awakened in the twentieth century by two gay antique dealers. Unlike Dracula, Blacula was only mildly villainous, and his purpose in our world was to reunite with the reincarnation of his beloved princess. By the climax of *Blacula*, most audience members were cheering for him to defeat the police authorities (whites, it goes without saying...) and other enemies. The final moments of the film were actually touching, as Blacula chose a dignified death—suicide by sunlight—rather than eternal life without his beloved.

In the sequel, *Scream Blacula Scream* (1973), Blacula was, again, concerned primarily with lifting the curse that made him a servant of evil. To this end, he recruited voodoo priestess Pam Grier. Again, Blacula was depicted as a vampire anti-hero, and audiences loved him.

Far less successful thematically and financially was AIP's one hundredth film¹, a re-casting of *Frankenstein* in the blaxploitation mold. *Blackenstein: The Black Frankenstein* (1973), as it was named, was the story of a Vietnam veteran and amputee who was given surgical replacements by the white "Dr. Stein." In a twist, it was an

African-America lab assistant who sabotaged the experiment, turning the vet into a monster. Crippled by a low-budget, weak acting, and an indifferent screenplay (which just seemed to stop mid-way through the film), *Blackenstein* turned out to be something of a bomb.

More interesting, and much more unusual was Bill Gunn's artful updating of the vampire myth in general, *Blood Couple* (1973), which starred *Night of the Living Dead*'s Duane Jones as a wealthy black man who became a vampire, and in the process, started to "feed" on the black community. A highly symbolic film filled with Christian and non-Christian imagery, Gunn's picture was known in some circles as *Ganja and Hess*, and it drew a very clear metaphor between vampirism and drug addiction. The film was a challenging one that received less coverage than it deserved, though it has been re-evaluated today.

The vampire myth was also "resurrected" under the AIP banner in *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and its sequel *The Return of Count Yorga* (1972), two films starring Robert Quarry as a modern-day vampire dwelling in trendy California. Quarry portrayed a particularly down-to-earth creature of the night in each franchise entry, and interestingly the first film had begun production as a low-budget (\$64,000) soft-core porno movie¹! That inauspicious beginning may have resulted in the final film's fascinating sleazy quality. In Los Angeles of the 1970s, Yorga was just another strange "creature of the night," and Quarry played him as a combination of a playboy, sugar daddy, and cult leader. In the second film, his primary task was to seduce a young Mariette Hartley.

The sexual side of the old movie monsters was not slighted in other 1970s films, either. Andy Warhol, the unusual pop artist celebrated in the late '60s and early '70s, produced two low-budget features *Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974) and *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* (1974), both directed by Paul Morrissey. These films featured screenplays that appeared to be improvised, and were envisioned as sex romps as much as horror films. Udo Kier starred as Dracula in the former and Dr. Frankenstein in the latter picture (shot in 3-D), and became a cult figure for his impenetrable (and often humorous) accent. In both films, Kier was opposed by the hunky but dim Joe

Dallesandro, and surrounded by a bevy of scantily clad ladies who had no inhibitions about baring it all for the project.

In *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, Kier portrayed a crippled Count searching for Italian virgins to “drink from,” and in *Frankenstein*, he was a craven mad-doctor seeking to assemble perfect bodies. The biggest stumbling block for Kier's Dr. Frankenstein was that he had an unfortunate habit of cutting open his cadavers and making love to their innards...

As the decade rolled on, even more controversial versions of the Dracula legend continued to appear. In 1970, prolific European filmmaker Jess Franco (1930–) undertook a difficult task. His *El Conde Dracula* promised to be a faithful version of Bram Stoker's novel, but offered mostly boredom, despite a powerful performance by Christopher Lee. Herbert Lom portrayed Van Helsing, and Klaus Kinski was Renfield, but Franco just didn't possess the directing chops (or the budget) to make the film fly. In one of the film's crazier sequences, a group of stuffed (and mounted) animal carcasses come to life, but the special effects are amateurish, and Franco generates no chills by continuously zooming in and out on the inanimate critters. The scene, like many in the film, goes on at embarrassing length.

In 1979, John Badham, the director of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), re-imagined the famous vampire Count yet again in yet another adaptation of *Dracula*. This time Dracula was portrayed as a dashing, perfectly coiffed romantic hero with an open shirt and a hairy chest. Frank Langella played the title role with enthusiasm, accenting the character's sexual appeal over the more horrific aspects of life as a vampire. Laurence Olivier played his nemesis, Van Helsing, and Kate Nelligan his intended.

Werner Herzog also resurrected Dracula, in slightly different fashion, in *Nosferatu* (1979), an artsy re-make of the 1922 silent film by Murnau. Klaus Kinski portrayed the rat-like vampire, and Isabelle Adjani (*Diabolique* [1995]) was his prey. The film had a fine sense of place and time, and used hundreds of rats to signal the vampire's (and death's...) arrival in Lucy's world.

The Price Is Right

The popularity of vampires and new franchise films (*Yorgas*, *Blaculas*, *Andy Warhols* and two *Dark Shadows*) in the early 1970s encouraged producers' notions that horror films could meet with great financial success when fronted by a particularly charismatic star or genre "icon." In the 1970s, Vincent Price (1911–1993) rose to this coveted spot, competing with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing as the most popular horror star of the decade. In 1971 and 1972 respectively, he portrayed a deranged mad scientist named "Dr. Phibes" in *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* and *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*. Directed by Robert Fuest, the films were inventive, humorous, roller coaster rides that existed primarily to showcase grotesque death-scenes and incredible set-designs. Price seemingly relished the role of a deformed scientist twisted by his need for revenge, and earned kudos for his tongue-in-cheek portrayal of a new "screen monster." In *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, Price visited ten curses on the medical professionals he deemed responsible for his wife's death, and in the sequel vied with co-star Robert Quarry to find the magical River of Life which could revive his beloved. Before the *Phibes* films were done, victims were killed by rats, hail, frogs, bats, locusts, scorpions, and even a giant vise.

Price played a similar role in 1973's *Theatre of Blood*. As Edwin Lionheart, he was a "great" (though hammy) actor dissed by London's haughty critical elite. With his hero-worshiping daughter (Diana Rigg) at his side, Lionheart set about murdering the critics by creatively (and violently...) re-enacting dramatic scenes from the plays of Shakespeare. Like the *Phibes* films, *Theatre of Blood* was well received for its potent combination of gore and humor.

There Is Still Only One...

Remakes proved to be incredibly popular in the 1970s, as the seemingly infinite variations of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* soon proved. But in 1976 along lumbered the decade's most controversial remake: Dino De Laurentiis' monster epic *King Kong* (1976). At first, Universal Studios and De Laurentiis had gone to war (and to court)

over which party had the right to produce a remake of the 1930s giant ape story. Universal desired to offer a faithful black-and-white remake of the 1933 original with Barbra Streisand in the Fay Wray role and Peter Falk as Carl Denham. It would be lensed in the then-popular mode of “sensurround,” which shook and jostled audiences at appropriate times during the picture.

By contrast, De Laurentiis wanted to update the legend, and offer a full-color, special effects extravaganza. He even promised that the big-budget film could be shot in a year, in time for a Christmas 1976 release. Unexpectedly, De Laurentiis won the rights to produce the remake (with Universal grabbing a piece of the profits), but then had to live up to his own bluster. John Guillermin, director of *The Towering Inferno* (1974), signed on to orchestrate the suddenly fast-track project, which would star Jeff Bridges and Charles Grodin.

No expense was spared to make the new *Kong* a spectacular blockbuster. The native wall that would block Kong from the native population of Skull Island, for instance, was 47 feet high, 500 feet long, made of eucalyptus tree trunks and 126,000 yards of grapevine. Alone, it cost one million dollars³. But that wouldn’t be the only excess, as time would reveal.

With a script penned by Lorenzo Semple, Jr., the new *King Kong* was controversial for a number of reasons. The first was that the colorful De Laurentiis claimed in print several times that Kong would be portrayed in his new film by a 50 foot fully articulated robot (built by Italian Carlo Rambaldi). In fact, Kong was portrayed in the film by a man in an ape suit (Rick Baker), a man who lumbered around on miniature sets ... just like in the myriad *Godzilla* films of Toho Studios. The Rambaldi robot was featured in only one sequence, wherein an out-of-sorts Kong breaks out of a cage at the moment of his “debut” in New York society. Also, the giant mechanical “Kong” hand was a disaster for the production team, often malfunctioning and causing several delays.



“I am not an animal, I am a human being ... in a gorilla costume.” The new *King Kong* (1976) bares his teeth.

Similarly, fans of the original *King Kong* did not cotton to Semple’s screenplay, which had a strong tongue-in-cheek element to it, and which replaced 1930s icons like the Empire State Building, with ’70s kitsch like the World Trade Center. Though the film is notable for introducing Oscar-winner Jessica Lange to Hollywood, it is today remembered as something of a bomb, despite the fact it made a huge profit for De Laurentiis and Paramount Studio. Historically, the film is valuable because it set the stage for the merchandising blitzes of later 1970s films like *Star Wars*. In 1976, for instance, Jim Beam offered a drink called the “King Kong Cocktail,” and fans of

the film could buy plastic glasses emblazoned with scenes from the film at Seven-Eleven Stores, or pull-out *King Kong* iron-ons from *Family Circle* magazine⁴. *King Kong* was one of the first movies as “media events,” and as such is worth remembering.

A more critically successful remake of a genre favorite came in 1978. Director Philip Kaufman re-made *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, based on the famous 1956 film by Don Siegel. It starred Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, Leonard Nimoy, Veronica Cartwright and Jeff Goldblum. Shot in scenic San Francisco, the film was lensed over a period of 49 days⁵, had a budget reported at 6 million dollars⁶, and competed at the box office with *Superman* (1978) and *The Wiz* (1978). Replete with a memorable and disturbing climax, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—take two—successfully re-imagined the Communist pod people of the 1950s as the alienated “me generation” of the 1970s. Improved special effects turned the foamy “pods” of the original into veiny, leathery purveyors of true terror, and the alien birthing sequences were a spell-binding showcase of gore. A perfect blend of paranoia and horror, the new *Invasion* took America by storm.

It's Not Nice to Fool with Mother Nature...

At the same time studios were seeking to propagate franchises headed by personalities such as Robert Quarry, William Marshall, Vincent Price, Jonathan Frid and Udo Kier, there was also a dawning realization that scary films could make a profit without a well-known leading man or lady's name above the title. Producers just had to play their cards right. In fact, rampaging animals made for the perfect “bogeymen” in a series of 1970s “revenge of nature” horror films. Most of these motion pictures were based on the idea that mankind, with his science, pollution and technology, had so poisoned the Earth that God's creations (such as frogs, spiders, worms, ants, and rabbits) would revolt wholesale against *Homo sapiens*.

In fairness, the idea of animals suddenly turning nasty and attacking their human superiors was not at all new to the 1970s.

Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece *The Birds* basically defined the genre in 1963. It just took until the 1970s for the next property in the trend to come along and successfully exploit the idea.

That property was *Willard*, the story of an isolated loner (Bruce Davison) who trains an army of rats to attack those who have wronged him. Ernest Borgnine played the film's nasty antagonist, and Elsa Lanchester was Willard's overbearing mother. Based on the novel *Ratman's Notebooks* by Stephen Gilbert, *Willard* cost just under one million dollars to produce, and very quickly grossed more than eight times that amount upon its release in 1971. The film's success was due, in no small part, to the film's fantastic "special effects": the trained rats themselves. In fact, a minimum of visual trickery was used in the film, and most scenes really deposited live rats in close association with the human cast (who had been smeared with peanut butter to make them more appetizing to beasties...). Moe Di Sessa trained the critters, and was acknowledged by many as the real "star" of *Willard*.

After the unexpected success of *Willard*, other filmmakers were so quick to jump on the animal bandwagon that 1972 became known as "the year of the rabbit, not to mention the pig, frog, snake, rabbit, spider and scorpion"⁷. Indeed, *Willard* ignited a red-hot "animal" movie trend that lasted throughout the remainder of the decade.

The year 1972 brought along a much-less-fun sequel to *Willard* entitled *Ben*. It featured a title song by Michael Jackson, and made a hero of its titular character, a resourceful black rat who led a rodent revolution in the sewers of Los Angeles. Lee Harcourt Montgomery played Ben's friend in the human community, Joseph Campanella his nemesis, but the film lacked the intelligence of the first picture. Though the closing moments of the movie set up the ground work for a sequel, no third "rat" picture was ever made. At least not yet.

Stanley (1972) was an out-and-out copy of *Willard*, but with a different loner (an orphaned American-Indian, Vietnam veteran played by *General Hospital*'s Chris Robinson). This time, the outsider was training a different breed of animals, snakes, to attack and murder his enemies. Among the victims in this low-budgeter was a stripper who had bitten off the head of a snake onstage. She paid

for her crimes dearly. Oh yes.

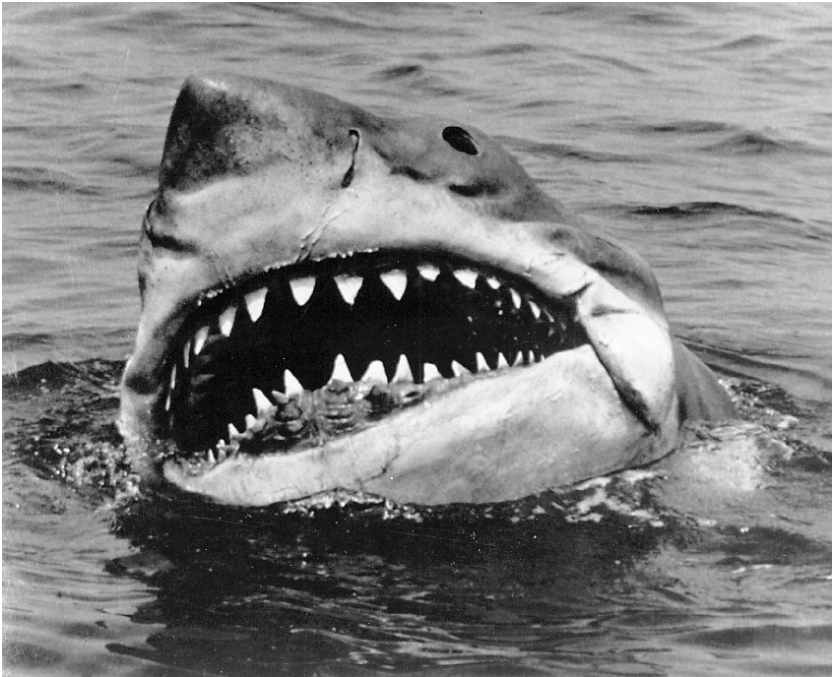
Then there was the oddball horror film *Night of the Lepus* (1972), starring Janet Leigh and *Star Trek*'s DeForest Kelley, about giant bunnies on the rampage in western prairies. In this case, scientists experimenting with hormones were to blame for the oversized rabbit crisis. The film was a joke for two reasons. Firstly, rabbits are hardly scary. Secondly, the lame special effects consisted primarily of rabbits jumping around on miniature sets in slow-motion photography.

Another famous animal film of '72 was *Frogs*, starring Ray Milland, Joan Van Ark, and Sam Elliott. The plot saw Milland, as the patriarch of a rich Southern family, punished for his polluting ways when frogs, crocodiles, lizards and other local wildlife attacked his exclusive plantation estate. Unlike *Willard*, the "attack" scenes in *Frogs* were poorly staged, with Ray Milland never even in the same shot as the frog army.

Before the decade was through, audiences also witnessed *The Bug* (1975), an adaptation of the Thomas Page novel *The Hephaestus Plague* about intelligent, fire-spewing cockroaches. The film, which was produced by William Castle and starred Bradford Dillman, had the misfortune of opening in American movie houses the same day as *Jaws* (1975)⁸. Next on the animal roster was *Squirm* (1976), about worms attacking a small southern community as the result of an electrical accident. *Squirm* was filmed in Port Wentworth, Georgia, and the movie's production team flew in thousands of live sandworms from Wiscasset, Maine; the climax alone featured some 250,000 wriggling critters⁹. After that offering came *The Pack* (about rabid dogs), starring Joe Don Baker and R.G. Armstrong.

Schlockmeister Bert I. Gordon (of *The Amazing Colossal Man* [1957]) even got into the animal act in 1976, with *Food of the Gods*, a film about giant rats shot in Vancouver, and the unforgettable Joan Collins vehicle *Empire of the Ants*, which was lensed in Panama¹⁰. Both films utilized primitive special effects to depict their oversized menaces, but have since become cult classics nonetheless. The bugaboo in *Empire of the Ants* was a shipment of radioactive waste, washed ashore on a "vacation" resort. Enterprising ants ate the radioactive goop, grew to colossal proportions, and then decided

that mankind should serve their queen. Humans Pamela Susan Shoop and Robert Lansing had other ideas, but escaping the ants was no picnic.



When animals attack: Bruce the Shark rears his head in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975).

The turning point in the “when animals attack” genre came in the year 1975 with the release of Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*, an adventure film based on the best-selling novel by Peter Benchley. The beautifully photographed, highly suspenseful movie pitted Roy Scheider, Richard Dreyfuss, Robert Shaw, and a small beach community named Amity against a hungry great white shark. In the first scene of the film, a lovely girl took a midnight swim in the beautiful Amity waters ... only to be ruthlessly devoured by nature’s oldest predator. That shocking opening set the tone for the rest of the picture, and changed horror films forever.

Accompanied by an expressive score from composer John Williams,

Jaws was also buttressed by bloody good special effects (and a mechanical shark named Bruce). It quickly became the highest grossing film of all time, and re-directed the animal craze towards a less-fantastic route. Giant animals were out, and real-life man-eaters were in. Scientific explanations for attacks were a thing of the past, and biological imperatives replaced them.

The first person out of the gate on this new aspect of the animal movie fad was low-budget filmmaker William Girdler. A veteran of such titles as *Asylum of Satan* (1971) and *Abby* (1974), Girdler armed forest ranger Christopher George against a rampaging grizzly bear in *Grizzly* (1976), the highest-grossing independent film of 1976. It was a ridiculously bad film, one that aped every aspect of *Jaws*, but it resonated with audiences who still wanted to be scared by attacking animals.

Similarly, *Night Creature* (1977) was filmed in Thailand and landed Donald Pleasence in close quarter combat with a big game cat, a black panther. *Orca* (1977) produced by Dino De Laurentiis, was another cockamamie fish story, with star Richard Harris duking it out with a killer whale that he had wronged! And Joe Dante, just 29 years old, directed the delightful *Piranha* (1978) another child of *Jaws*, and one of the most successful features released by its studio, New World Pictures¹¹. Finally, along flew *Nightwing* (1979), a film its director, Arthur Hiller, dubbed “*Jaws* with wings on an Indian Reservation”¹². Its subject? Vampire bats.

Before Jimmy Carter was out of office, the animal trend in horror films was completely exhausted by a number of exceedingly bad variations on the theme. A swarm of killer bees ravaged Houston (and Michael Caine) in master-of-disaster Irwin Allen’s lackluster *The Swarm* (1978), a film which cost a then-staggering 12 million dollars. Holes in the ozone caused lions and tigers and bears (oh my!) to attack Leslie Nielsen in Bill Girdler’s follow-up to *Grizzly*, entitled *Day of the Animals* (1977). This Girdler picture didn’t emulate *Grizzly*’s box office numbers, in no small part because it opened the same day as a popular little 1970s film entitled *Star Wars* (1977).

Another weak link in the animal sweepstakes was *Prophecy* (1979), directed by John Frankenheimer, which explored the notion that

mercury poisoning had mutated wild-life in a Maine forest. *Prophecy* was undone by weak special effects, particularly its unconvincing “monster” suit, but Talia Shire did well with a subplot involving her unborn child ... an embryo also threatened by mercury poisoning.

In 1978, there was also the inevitable sequel, *Jaws II*. Roy Scheider was back as Sheriff Brody, again combating a great white shark in Amity waters, but this time Richard Dreyfuss chose not to appear, and a bevy of virtually indistinguishable teenagers had supporting roles. Jeannot Szwarc (director of *The Bug*) replaced another director, John Hancock, early in the Florida shoot, and salvaged the film as much as was possible considering the studio’s haste to release the film.

However, the best of all the post-*Jaws* animal attack movies was *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977), a tense little opus about an organized tarantula attack on a small Arizona community. The cause of this animal revolt was overuse of pesticides in the region, and *Star Trek* veteran William Shatner starred as the appealing veterinarian combating the arachnid plague. As in *Willard*, more than five years before, *Kingdom of the Spiders* benefited from a sense of realism. Its actors (including Shatner) were frequently seen in the same shots as the spiders, and there seemed to be a minimum of post-production trickery.

Oppositely, the worst film about attacking animals also featured spiders. Bill Rebane’s *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975), which re-dressed a Volkswagen bug as a hairy, oversized tarantula, represented the nadir of 1970s animal cinema. Alan Hale—the skipper of *Gilligan’s Island*—portrayed a town sheriff combating this particular threat, which had arrived in rural Wisconsin courtesy of an inconveniently open “black hole.”

He’s in the Details: Devil Cinema of the 1970s

If *Jaws* proved to be the inspiration for a litter of animal attack movies, then William Friedkin’s 1973 blockbuster, *The Exorcist*, must have been the source for at least two dozen or so “devil”

themed horror movies in the 1970s. Based on the best-selling novel by William Peter Blatty, which in turn was based on a “real life” case of demonic possession in 1949 Washington, D.C., *The Exorcist* is, perhaps, like *Jaws*, a film which changed horror cinema forever. At the same time that director Friedkin packed his movie with memorable, over-the-top special effects such as projectile green-pea vomit, levitating beds, and spinning heads, he also recounted this riveting story in more starkly realistic terms than any horror film before *The Exorcist*.

In lensing the trauma of a possessed girl, Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair), Friedkin employed documentary-style techniques for the opening “travelogue” portion in Iraq, as well as the latest psychological jargon to explain the inexplicable, and even subliminal imagery to foster terror. Adding to the sense of authenticity, three Catholic priests, Father Thomas V. Birmingham, Father John Nicola and Father William O'Malley, consulted on the project and played priests in the film.

Though *The Exorcist* was badly received by critics at the time of its release, and vehemently denounced by many religious authorities (including the Reverend Billy Graham), it became a top grosser at the box office, earning more than 90 million dollars. Hollywood recognized the film's excellence as well, giving it the nod with 10 Academy Award nominations. When the film was re-released in the summer of 2000, it was a high earner again, despite 25 years of “improvements” in genre pictures. According to Friedkin, who was interviewed while making the film, *The Exorcist's* sense of reality is what grants it such power.

I intend to do it very realistically. It's a realistic story about inexplicable things, and it's all going to take place in cold light, with ordinary people, on ordinary streets¹³.

Shot in 85 days, with roughly two thirds of that time spent in New York City and one third on location in Georgetown, *The Exorcist* revolutionized the horror film. As crazy as the subject matter was, the film felt real, and the actors (including Max Von Sydow, Ellen Burstyn and Jason Miller) played it that way. Blatty produced the movie, based on his own script, and reportedly signed a deal

reserving him in excess of 20 percent of the film's profits. It was a smart move, and like Friedkin, he had an agenda in shepherding his novel to the screen:

My primary purpose in the film is to persuade those who do not believe that there is a case to be made for the supernatural and to offer the possibility that there is a supernatural force of evil at work in the universe whose game plan is to convince us that he does not exist¹⁴.

One might even say that Blatty reached his goal too well, because very shortly, *The Exorcist* spawned a number of imitations in the "Devil" cycle of the 1970s. *Beyond the Door* (1975) was an Italian variation on the Friedkin film in which a possessed Juliet Mills was pregnant with the Devil's spawn. William Girdler's *Abby* (1974) saw *The Exorcist* re-hashed as a blaxploitation film, with another demonic possession of a young girl in evidence (and William Marshall of *Blacula* fame as the exorcist on record.)



The power of the box office compels them! The final showdown

in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973).

Nineteen-hundred and seventy five's *The Devil's Rain* cast Willard's heavy, Ernest Borgnine, as Corbis, a satanic priest damning helpless souls (including Ida Lupino, William Shatner, and Tom Skerritt) to Hell with the help of a demonic ledger. *Race with the Devil* (1975) was another strange excursion into devil territory, placing tourists Peter Fonda and Loretta Swit in a road rage situation with pursuing, hot-rodding Satanists (led by R.G. Armstrong). A kind of early, demonic *The Road Warrior* (1981), the film was a high-octane action movie and a horror film to boot.

Then came David Seltzer's *The Omen* (1976), a polished, big budget horror film that concerned the ascent of the Devil's child on Earth, the antichrist. Politics were involved as the young Devil boy, named Damien, infiltrated the powerful Thorn family headed by Gregory Peck. *The Omen* very quickly became famous for its over-the-top gore sequences, particularly the moment when actor David Warner's head appeared to be rather convincingly severed by a sheet of plate glass.

The Sentinel (1977) was yet another devil film, this one highlighting the plight of a fallen woman (Christine Rains) whose fate was to defend the gateway to Hell (in a New York brownstone...) from demons. Burgess Meredith played a ghost, John Carradine an earlier Sentinel (a blind priest), and Michael Sarandon was Rains' unscrupulous boyfriend. Though much of the movie was lackluster and muddled, its final moments—which cast the real-life physically deformed as souls trapped in Hell—were oddly unsettling.

Finally, there was *Damien—Omen II*, Don Taylor's 1978 sequel to *The Omen*. This follow-up to the blockbuster sent the Antichrist off packing to military school (under the tutelage of *Millennium*'s Lance Henriksen...). No matter where audiences went in the 1970s, it seemed they couldn't escape the Devil or his cinematic minions.

In fairness to *The Exorcist*, it didn't actually spawn the devil cycle of the 1970s, though it no doubt popularized the horror sub-genre. In fact, before *The Exorcist*, there was a whole slew of satanic films making the rounds, though most of them were forgettable low-budget films. *Asylum of Satan* (1971) was William Girdler's first

film, and it concerned the Devil's attempt to impregnate a virgin with his progeny. Lucifer faced disappointment in an unintentionally funny ending, which established that the virgin was more experienced than the Prince of Darkness had anticipated.

The Brotherhood of Satan (1971) was a disturbing little film in which cult leader Strother Martin attempted to possess the souls of several children in a small town so his coven members could attain virtual immortality. Instead of being hampered by limited resources, director Bernard McEveety staged creepy P.O.V. attacks on the *dramatis personae* in moments that seemed genuinely infused with evil. Maybe it was just the cameraman, but there always seemed to be a dark presence just out of view in this effective horror picture.

A Touch of Satan (1973) and *Daughters of Satan* (1972) followed similar lines, equating witchcraft with Devil worship. *Daughters of Satan* was particularly ludicrous, but is remembered today for introducing the world to its star, Tom Selleck. A bigger-budget entry in the Devil market was *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), which depicted reporter Alan Alda losing his soul to pianist and Satanist Curt Jurgens. Alda's wife, Jacqueline Bisset, noted the change, but in an odd-twist found the new soul in her husband's body to be a superior lover...

Interestingly, just as *The Exorcist* had revved up interest in satanic cinema, so did its sequel, *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) dim such interest. Directed by John Boorman and starring a teenage Linda Blair, this sequel failed to live up to its predecessor, and has since earned an honored position among all bad-movie lovers. It has been described as "the greatest commercial disappointment of any film in the 1970s" even though the director has argued that it contains some of his "best work"¹⁵. In fact, the film is a strange journey into the nature of evil, and it lacks many of the notable scary effects that dominated the first film. Richard Burton played a priest and Louise Fletcher a psychologist, but even these fine actors could do little with stilted dialogue, and patently absurd touches (such as a "synch" device which could connect the minds of two individuals through hypnosis).

Psycho—logy

Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* gave rise to all manner of feral cinematic offspring in the 1970s, but it is the master of suspense's biggest box office success, *Psycho* (1960), that wielded the greatest influence on the horror films of the 1970s. The surprise revelation of *Psycho*'s climax (that Norman Bates *was* his mother); the wordy psychological explanation for his mental condition (recounted in *Psycho*'s exposition-heavy coda); and the shock of a major character dying early in the proceedings (à la Janet Leigh in the shower), very quickly became *de rigueur* elements in the 1970s psycho film trend.

A bicycle trip through rural France became an opportunity for horror when two English girls were stalked by a murderer in Robert Fuest's tautly directed psycho-film, *And Soon the Darkness* (1970). When her traveling companion "disappeared," tourist Pamela Franklin, alone in a foreign land, had to escape a deadly stretch of highway. Was the killer that man she had seen at a café? The strange local constable? A British teacher living in France? Or was the killer that strange, barely glimpsed figure, seen at a distance in the fields far from the road's pavement? The variety of suspects, the language barrier, and the impending nightfall all made this film a tense, effective one.

Play Misty for Me (1971), directed by Clint Eastwood, was another variation of the *Psycho* ethos, as a "hip" California disc jockey (Eastwood) was stalked by a zealous fan he'd once had a fling with. This groupie (Jessica Walter) began the film as a sexy one-night fling, and ended it as a knife-wielding maniac. Replete with a 1970s-style "jazz" montage/interlude, *Play Misty* offered a sometimes vulgar-mouthed assailant who could be sexy and vulnerable one moment, murderous the next. Today, we'd say she is bi-polar, but in 1971 there was no one around to pass out the Prozac, and she was terrifying.

The master himself, Alfred Hitchcock, returned to the terrain of *Psycho* in his 52nd film, *Frenzy* (1972). The film focused on the hijinks of a serial killer in London dubbed the "Necktie Murderer." In reality, the anti-social bloke was a "kindly" grocer who had a thing for strangling women. The film is notorious for one particular

sequence, the strangulation of actress Barbara Leigh Hunt, which director Hitchcock lingered on with more than loving attention. The murder sequence culminated in the implication that the killer had been sexually satisfied by his gruesome handiwork, and remains a truly perverse bit of filmmaking. Otherwise, the grocer with the choking fetish was a total sociopath: a smiling monster who might just live next door. What was surprising about the film was that Hitchcock alternated laughs with suspense, particularly in a sequence that found the killer outsmarting himself in the back of a potato truck.

Cinematic killers had all kinds of bizarre mental hang-ups in the 1970s psycho movies. A boy who despised his shrewish mother for arguing with his father (and for taking away his teddy bear...) grew up to be a homicidal woman-hater (and carnie...) in the low-budget entry filmed on Coney Island *Carnival of Blood* (1971). The same film had the honor of introducing *Rocky's* (1976) Burt Young to the world.

A playboy with a pathological hatred for brides and weddings set out to destroy beautiful newlyweds in Italian Mario Bava's kinky *Hatchet for a Honeymoon* (1971). A man guilty about committing his daughter to an insane asylum went on an axe-murder spree in a small town with a secret in the completely nutty *Silent Night, Bloody Night* (1973). A politician enmeshed in a political scandal and ashamed about his own impotence staged a series of gory killings in the debauched *Savage Weekend* (1978). A little girl was suspected of committing murder in New Jersey's contribution to "stalk-n-slash" cinema, *Alice, Sweet Alice* (1977), but in fact a woman twisted by Catholicism was to blame for the violence.

By far and away, however, it was the killer with "the splintered psyche" who was most popular in the psycho-films of the 1970s. In Brian DePalma's *Sisters* (1973), a Siamese twin (Margot Kidder) so mourned her deceased twin that she developed a split personality. When she adopted the characteristics of her dead sibling, she also became homicidal. DePalma utilized split screens to reinforce the notion of doubling, and schizophrenia. In *Magic* (1977), the retiring, shy Anthony Hopkins also developed a murderous alternative personality, but this time in a ventriloquist's dummy named Corky

rather than an imaginary sibling. In *Schizo* (1976), a schizophrenic young bride (Lynne Frederick) executed a series of terrible murders, though the film's *modus operandi* had audiences believing it was her convicted father-in-law who was the true culprit.

Two interesting psycho films of the decade utilized a modern convenience, the telephone, as an instrument of horror. In 1974's *Black Christmas*, a hidden madman utilized the phone to stalk the comely residents of a Canadian sorority (including Margot Kidder and Olivia Hussey). The ringing of the phone very soon became a prompt for terror, and the film never revealed the identity of its loquacious maniac. Keir Dullea was one of the suspects, and John Saxon played the police officer investigating the crimes.

When a Stranger Calls (1979) was a more coherent genre exercise that made use of the telephone, with a psychopath terrorizing a babysitter (Carol Kane) by pitch of night. In a truly frightening preamble, the film revealed that the psycho—an escaped mental patient—was calling from *inside* the house. Charles Durning was the cop who chased down this madman, but it was the silk-voiced killer, who kept croaking “have you checked the children?” who remained most memorable.

If there was one psycho-on-the-loose film that defined the 1970s, it was director John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). Written by producer Debra Hill and Carpenter, *Halloween* began the seemingly unending saga of Michael Myers, one of cinema's most enduring monsters. After escaping from a mental institution (and psychiatrist Donald Pleasence), the masked sociopath returned to his sleepy little hometown, Haddonfield, on All Hallow's Eve, to terrorize three teenagers (Jamie Lee Curtis, P.J. Soles and Nancy Loomis). Shot in 22 days at a cost of \$300,000, *Halloween* became the top grossing independent film of all time (until 1990). A critical favorite, *Halloween* also spawned dozens of imitations in the 1980s (including *Friday the 13th* [1980], *Prom Night* [1980], *Mother's Day* [1981], *My Bloody Valentine* [1981], and *New Year's Evil* [1981] to name but a few).

More interestingly, *Halloween* solidified the horror credentials of its director, John Carpenter, who has since become a major voice in the genre. The film also changed the direction of the psycho-film.

Before *Halloween*, the psycho-films, like *Schizo*, *Magic* and *Sisters*, all sought reasonable explanations in psychology. *Halloween* was literally anti-Hitchcockian because it suggested that there was no rational explanation for Myers. Unlike Norman Bates, Myers was pure evil. He was the bogeyman, the “Shape.” He was unstoppable, and unkillable. Later films, such as the adventures of Jason Voorhees, adopted the same anti-rational stance, though to a much lesser effect. The indestructible super human that no science could diagnose thus supplanted the “human” monster that was a victim of his own mind.

The multitude of psycho films in the 1970s ran the gamut of themes. Hammer’s 1973 film, *Fear in the Night*, re-staged the dynamic of *Les Diaboliques* (1955), with two lovers conspiring to drive a spouse (Judy Geeson) to the deathbed. *Don’t Look in the Basement* (1973) revived the old chestnut of an insane asylum run by maniacs, including an axe wielding freak. *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* (1976) was “based on the true story” of a serial killer’s rampage in Texarkana in the late 1940s, and had some brutal moments in it. In 1971’s *See No Evil* (starring Mia Farrow), a killer was defined only by his telltale cowboy boots. Nothing else was revealed about him (beside his homicidal acts).



Draped in a sheet, Michael Myers approaches his next victim in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978).

Taking the opposite route, George A Romero's *Martin* (1976) was a study in psychology. Martin, a lonely outsider twisted by the religious guilt and shame of his conservative upbringing, fancied himself a vampire, and so re-shaped himself into one. With razors, hypodermic needles and other tools of the technological 20th century, he went out into the night and claimed victims as a vampire would—drinking their blood. Filmed for less than \$100,000 dollars¹⁶, *Martin* was a low-budget masterpiece, a

sensitive horror film starring, like *Psycho* before it, a truly pitiable madman.

The Savage Cinema

A woman bites off a man's penis while giving him head. A vacationer is ordered to squeal like a pig while sodomized by an unwashed mountain man. A teenager is impaled on a meat hook by a squealing lunatic who wears human skin. A crazed cannibal bites the head off a parakeet and drinks the bird's life-blood like it's a Budweiser. These things can't be happening, and yet they do happen—*onscreen*—in the high impact films of the 1970s savage cinema. "The New Freedom" in film meant that more graphic violence could be shown in all kinds of films, and horror movie directors such as Wes Craven, Tobe Hooper, Sam Peckinpah, Stanley Kubrick and John Boorman took advantage of the development. In the process they created some of the most perverse, disgusting *and intense* horror films imaginable.

The Vietnam War may have been the catalyst for the 1970s "savage" cycle. After all, that war (and the media) had brought atrocities into American living rooms with stunning news footage. Monks immolated themselves. Soldiers shot innocent civilians in the head. American soldiers burned down villages, and so forth. If that wasn't bad enough, there were the Manson murders to contend with at home. In this real-life horror, ex-hippies ripped out the entrails of their victims, and even killed an expectant mother. How could any fiction compare with these apocalypses, all of which were being gleefully shepherded into suburbia by Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather and their ilk? Accordingly, a primary tenet of the so-called savage cinema is that terrible things happen to good people for no larger purpose or reason.

The Last House on the Left (1972), Wes Craven's first feature film, was a secular re-telling of the Ingmar Bergman religious epic *The Virgin Spring* (1958). In it, two nice suburban girls, Mari and Phyllis, are kidnapped, raped and murdered by a gang of escaped convicts. In a bizarre twist, the criminals led by Krug (David Hess), end up at

the home of one of their victim's. The parents of the slain Mari then brutally kill the thugs with their bare hands. A suburban housewife bites off the manhood of a sex offender after luring him to the backyard, while a mild general practitioner puts down scalpel for chainsaw and decapitates Krug. It's a vicious descent into violence, and Craven's camera captures it all with brutal efficiency. The song which repeats on the soundtrack, "The Road Leads to Nowhere," reminds audiences that nothing has been gained through the bloody revenge ("the castle stays the same..."), and everything—especially innocence—has been sacrificed.

Though the film was roundly excoriated by critics (but for Roger Ebert), the low-budget production (shot for under \$100,000 dollars in Westport, New York) confronted issues of violence in a respectable manner. Yes, *Last House* depicted scenes of sickening behavior and violence, but it also disdained such behavior and showed that ultimately it had no purpose. In other words, *Last House on the Left* was *about* violence, not merely exploiting it for box office potential.

At around the same time, other film artists were on the same page as Craven. Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971) was also a meditation about the place of violence in society. In this movie, a geeky mathematician (Dustin Hoffman) was driven to brutal murder when locals (led by Ken Hutchison) raped his wife (Susan George) and threatened to kill the village simpleton (David Warner). Some viewers saw the picture as a validation of the macho ethos, as a sort of fascist "rite of passage" film. But the movie was much more than a brutal parable about the nature of man; it was an examination of what happens when a person is simply pushed too far, and his security is threatened. It is about a man who finds that place within himself where violence is the only solution left. The last twenty minutes of *Straw Dogs* were particularly harrowing, and included a siege on Hoffman's farm house involving bear traps, boiling water, and gaping gunshot wounds. It was unremittently violent, but like *Last House on the Left*, was powerful in its themes and meaning. Both of these films were part of the sub-class of horror films that have come to be known as "rape and revenge."

Deliverance, a story of survival in the wild, very much traded on the

same issues, this time pitting four city boys (Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight, Ned Beatty, and Ronny Cox) against a roaring, unforgiving river and two redneck “wild men.” John Boorman’s film was a legitimate rite of passage picture, a test of resilience and strength in the most traumatic of situations and locations. Some survived the ordeal, some were horribly scarred, and the experience of life and death was as basic as the forest in which it all occurred. *Deliverance* was one part culture-clash, one part natural adventure, and completely hardcore. It put people off of camping for years.

The 1970s savage cinema reached its pinnacle in 1974 with Tobe Hooper’s premiere feature film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Unlike other entries in this particular horror cycle, *Chainsaw* had no explicit meaning or greater thematic purpose. It was purposefully anti-rational, a plunge into a nightmare world where man was little more than “meat” to a deranged family of cannibals. A retarded human called Leatherface, armed with his saw, would cut up anyone (even invalids...) for ingredients in his family’s special barbecue. And there was no reasoning with this particular cook, either. He didn’t relate to human beings as such, and wasn’t interested even in sex (until the 1987 sequel...). The story of five teens who ran afoul of Leatherface occurred under a hot, and careless, Texas sun; *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* reeked of random, irrational violence.

Chainsaw’s power as a film was that it successfully put viewers into the mindset of a caged, hunted animal about to be cut up for someone’s stew. It was chilling, extreme, and totally over-the-top. Though there was little blood seen in the final cut, Hooper’s *Chainsaw* is psychologically savage. Like the humming teeth of that chainsaw, the film never stops, and is buttressed by its insane momentum.

The savage cinema took a variety of forms in the 1970s. Stanley Kubrick played rape and brutality as fast-motion, operatic ballet in 1971’s notorious (and X-rated) epic, *A Clockwork Orange*. He infuriated his critics because the film suggested it was better to tolerate monsters like “Droogie” Alex (Malcolm McDowell) than to live in a society that repressed individuality. 1979’s *I Spit on Your Grave* was also part of the “rape and revenge” sub-genre, depicting

how a beautiful female writer wreaks revenge on four rapists (including a retarded grocery delivery boy). In one especially gruesome sequence, the writer castrated the worst of her assailants during a seductive bubble bath, and the tub turned deep red with his blood in seconds. Unlike *Last House on the Left*, there seemed to be little context or meaning in the violence of *I Spit on Your Grave*. Instead it evinced only “eye for an eye” justice, like the worst of the *Death Wish* films.

Cannibalism was an important element of the violent 1970s films, perhaps because it represented the ultimate taboo to be broken, and the '70s were all about breaking taboos. In addition to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, men ate men in Wes Craven's brutal battle for territorial superiority, *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). The film waged a bloody war between a “civilized” family (the Carters), and a savage one in the hot Nevada desert. Before long the differentiation between families was lost.

Cannibalism was played with more lightly in the Australian horror satire *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* (1972), at a bed and breakfast with an unusual menu, and for unintentional humor in such non-classics as *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974) and *Bloodsucking Freaks* (1977).

If unflinching, brutal violence and bloody gore were prime facets of the 1970s trend of “savage” films, then at least two other films deserve mention in this category. George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) featured more bullets to the head and raw scenes of cannibalism than any film in motion picture history before or since. It went out to theaters unrated and was a smash hit with critics and audiences alike. The sequel to *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn* set four human survivors against the zombie plague in a suburban shopping mall. The film saw limbs torn asunder, blood feasted upon, skulls crunched by helicopter blades and other disgusting set-pieces, while balancing that violent mentality with pie-fights and overt satire of the 1970s consumer culture. It was an adroit mix that kept audiences off-balance, and tense. A less elegant sequel, *Day of the Dead* followed Romero's masterpiece in 1985.

Finally, there was *Alien* (1979), directed by Ridley Scott. This \$10 million feature (which opened two years to the day after *Star Wars*) might have been termed *Jaws in Space*, as it featured a malevolent

extraterrestrial killing off the crew of a commercial spaceship. But there was one scene in *Alien* that catapulted the film to legendary status. About mid-way through the proceedings, an alien “chest burster” unexpectedly wormed its way out of astronaut John Hurt’s stomach, leaving the rest of the film’s shell-shocked cast covered in blood and guts. This scene alone was indicative of the fact that, by decade’s end, there were no boundaries left to be broken. Anything that could be depicted on film, no matter how disgusting and repellant, would be depicted. In the next decade, it would be expected, and gore and violence would no longer seem so savage, but simply, and frighteningly, *routine*.

Science Gone Awry

In 1970s America, it was difficult to see how science had not gone completely wild. The incident at Three Mile Island proved that nuclear power wasn’t so safe after all. The Apollo 13 mission nearly tanked, almost killing its crew. The world’s first test tube baby was born, and that fact unnerved conservatives who felt that God’s master plan was being tampered with. Medicine failed to cure cancer or any other major diseases, and the country (and the world at large) hadn’t found a cheap or effective alternative for fossil fuel during the energy crisis either. Military equipment, scientific technology and good old American know-how had failed to get the hostages in Iran released, and so forth. Science—*once the new frontier of human ingenuity*—was more or less responsible for every one of these failures, and people were, not surprisingly, losing faith in it. Earlier successes, such as the trip to the moon in 1969, were even believed to be Watergate-like conspiracies in mainstream adventure films such as *Capricorn One* (1978). The magazine *New West* succinctly described the situation:

Increasingly, we have handed over our destinies, our bodies, our lives to specialized experts. The short-term effects have been dazzling in some cases. Over the longer range, however, our dependence on expertise is creating a paralyzing sense of individual helplessness. And the experts

have often been wrong. They showed us how to defeat the Vietcong with technology. They concocted deadly pesticides to increase food production. They devised indestructible plastic substances to take the place of metal and wood¹⁷.

It was not a shock, considering the backlash against science, that many horror movies of the 1970s blamed the medical and technological quarters for their innumerable and strange disasters. Remember the giant, malevolent bunnies of *Night of the Lepus* (1972), and the encroaching arachnids in *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977)? Science had caused these anomalies by experimenting with rabbit hormones and over-spraying dangerous pesticides in spider territory, respectively. But there was more.

The cinema of Canadian director David Cronenberg in the '70s was a virtual paean to the overreaching dangers and errors of the scientific community. A modern, and totally misguided, doctor unwittingly released a "sexual plague" in the contained Starliner Apartment Complex in 1975's *Shivers* (also known as *The Parasite Murders* and *They Came from Within*). The genetically engineered slug-like parasite jumped from person to person in the graphic film, infecting children and adults alike, turning them into strange sex zombies.

Cronenberg's follow-up, *Rabid* (1976), saw another irresponsible doctor (at the Keloid Institute this time) releasing a similar plague into unsuspecting Montreal. This infection commenced with a skin graft on porn star Marilyn Chambers, and proceeded into a strange case of rabies that spread across the community at lightning-fast speed. Cronenberg's final horror film of the '70s, *The Brood* (1979), dramatized the story of another scientist (a psychologist played by Oliver Reed) who was able to create "living" embodiments of rage in the form of a murderous brood of hooded children.

George A. Romero's 1973 film *The Crazies* (also known as *The Mad People* and *Codename: Trixie*) was in synch with many of Cronenberg's graphic imaginings, revealing how the government, military and scientific establishments had released a biological weapon, "Trixie," into the drinking water of a small Pittsburgh town. The film examined martial law (like *Rabid*), and defined the

military and scientific community's mentality as nothing less than insane. Predictably, there was no end in sight to the plague of *The Crazies*...

The films of novelist Michael Crichton also ran with the fear that science had gone dangerously awry. In *The Andromeda Strain*, directed by Robert Wise, another American town (this time in the Southwest) was destroyed by an alien disease carried back from a national space satellite. The military and scientific communities failed to contain the entity, and winds threatened to spread the deadly bacterial agent across the continental United States.

Westworld, directed by Crichton himself, was a futuristic tale about an expensive amusement park where humans could interact with realistic robots in fantasy settings (Roman World, Westworld, and Medieval World). Not surprisingly, the robots, led by Yul Brynner, didn't appreciate being treated as slaves, and turned murderous. Man's very technology, his trusted friend once taken for granted, had turned on him. *The Terminal Man* (1974), directed by Mike Hodges and based on another Crichton novel, also took a swipe at the medical establishment. In this film, doctors surgically implanted a behavior modification chip into the brain of a violent offender (George Segal). But instead of containing the man's violence, the new technology only spurred murderous anti-social behavior. The message, not unlike that in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, was that men of science shouldn't endeavor to play God.

As the decade wore on, science became the scapegoat for all kinds of monstrosities. Ghoulish body transplants were the subject of the British entry *Scream and Scream Again* (1970). Scientist Rock Hudson tampered with fetal growth in the low-budget *Embryo* (1976) and ended up creating a so-called "perfect woman" named Victoria (Barbara Carrera). The only problem was that Hudson's new creation, an adult, sexual being, had no morals and no hesitation in killing. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977) explored how scientist Burt Lancaster had fooled with animal and human DNA to create a race of "humanimals." On his island paradise, actually St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, sixty-three-year-old Lancaster menaced protagonist Michael York and his innocent ward, Barbara Carrera again. By the film's denouement, Moreau had been strung up by his

own animal creations for daring to tamper in God's domain.

Another curious scientist interfered in the cycle of life in *The Asphyx* (1972), because he believed he could prevent death. Strother Martin, previously a cult leader in *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), played a mad scientist in *Ssssss* (1973), a picture which cost \$600,000 dollars and transformed hunky Dirk Benedict (later of *Battlestar Galactica* [1978]) into a snake-man. Cloning was another dread of the decade, and the subject of the 12 million dollar ITC picture *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) and the more low budget *The Clonus Horror* (1979), to name just two.

The atmosphere of fear surrounding medicine grew so paranoid that doctors, along with government bureaucrats, became the villains of a number of medical dramas. Michael Crichton's *Coma* (1978) was a prime example of this trend, as Genevieve Bujold and Michael Douglas learned of a wide-ranging hospital conspiracy to incapacitate patients and then sell their healthy organs to the highest bidders. From the ridiculous (amphibious, genetically engineered Nazi troopers in *Shock Waves* [1970]) and the routine (*Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* [1970]) to 3-D gimmickry (*Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* [1974]), the villainy of modern science came in all shapes, sizes and colors (*Blackenstein* [1973]). It was a decade of unrest and uncertainty about the shape of things to come.

Women's Studies

A corollary to "science gone awry" was the socially minded horror films of the 1970s, in which women's issues were at stake. Scientific advances (and mistakes) were again to blame for the problems, but the disasters in these films always impacted women, and changed their role in our society.

George Romero's little-seen *Jack's Wife* (1971) was a horror film about a woman who believed society had defined her only as the spouse of a distant, "superior" husband. In dreams, she imagined herself to be her husband's dog, leashed and caged. Then, the woman "discovered" witchcraft and her own individual voice. At

first a symbol of her independence, witchcraft ultimately proved to be as much a trap as the shackles of a patriarchal society.

The Stepford Wives (1975) starred Katherine Ross as a “liberated” woman who moved to a small Connecticut town with her family. She very soon learned that the women of Stepford were “different.” In fact, the wives of this suburban utopia were robots programmed to “please” husbands. Ross learned of the secret too late, and discovered her husband had arranged for her to be in line for the same treatment. The film, based on the novel by Ira Levin, was horror and satire at the same time, examining the changing role of women in 1970s America. Men still wanted cooking, cleaning, baby machines, and in Stepford, that job description prevailed. A photographer and free-thinker, Ross’s character wanted more out of life than to pick up after the baby and her husband, but her needs were not considered by the patriarchal conspiracy. In the amazing conclusion of the film, Ross faced a robotic Doppelgänger ... one with bigger breasts, and the movie’s point was made visually.

In *Demon Seed* (1977), another liberated 1970s career woman, this time played by Julie Christie, faced the same brand of personal apocalypse. After deciding not to bear children with her workaholic husband, Christie’s character, a psychologist, was kidnapped by her husband’s latest creation, a super-advanced computer called Proteus (voiced by Robert Vaughn). The computer locked Christie in her home, raped her, and forced her to conceive his child ... a hybrid of human genetics and artificial intelligence.

Again, the role of the woman in contemporary society was the subject of a horror film, this time one based on a novel by Dean Koontz. Proteus was so intelligent a computer (and so powerful an abuser) that he could force Christie’s character to experience an orgasm against her will, and one felt the filmmakers were making a potent point. Some men want to control women’s biology, to the point of telling them when and how to experience pleasure.

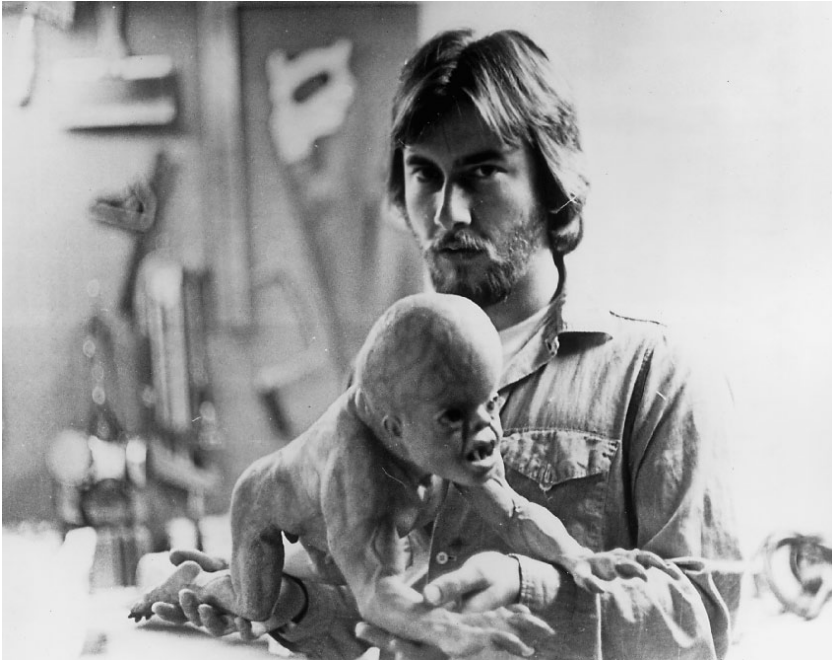
Larry Cohen’s *It’s Alive* (1973) and *It Lives Again* (1978) concerned a human issue that has often been written in terms of a woman’s right to choose, but in fact, the double-bill dealt with a universal human issue: reproduction. What would happen if it were learned that many American women were carrying in their wombs mutant

babies (a result of environmental contaminants such as microwaves, x-rays and the like)? Would the women choose to abort the babies? Would the government force the women to abort the babies? Would religious groups demand that the babies be allowed to live, even if, as in the films, they turned out to be homicidal monsters? Would the mothers, once they gave birth to the mutant babies, bond with their children? These issues of conception, birth, abortion, bonding, parenthood and reproduction were at the heart of Cohen's tense low-budget films, as were Rick Baker's primitive but efficient "baby" special effects. Few who saw *It's Alive's* monster babies (puppets, actually), would ever forget the murderous tykes, or the issues they raised about what it means to be a "parent."

Psychic Powers, the Paranormal, and Haunted Houses

Not every horror movie made in the 1970s spoke specifically to the fears of the decade. There were many, many horror films that used the same ideas and settings that had appeared in genre films since the beginning of the medium. Instead of offering new ideas on these well-worn topics, the horror films of the 1970s improved on the special effects wizardry of past efforts, and generally offered more intensity than their predecessors.

Perhaps because science had proven so lousy at handling many of America's problems, audiences turned to more "extreme" possibilities in the 1970s, hence the resurgence of films about psychic powers. *Carrie* (1976), based on the first novel by horrormeister Stephen King, and directed by Brian DePalma, highlighted the travails of a shy girl (Sissy Spacek) who developed telekinetic powers on the eve of her transition to adulthood (signaled by the onset of her period). Once imbued with the power to defend herself, Carrie struck back "psychically" at her Christian fanatic mother (Piper Laurie) as well as the cruel teens at her high school that had victimized her (including Nancy Allen and John Travolta). The picture was so stylishly shot by DePalma, and well acted by Spacek that *Carrie* set off a mini-trend of its own.



One man and a (mutant) baby: Make-up guru Rick Baker fondles the monstrous child of *It's Alive* (1973).

Before long, there was *Ruby* (1977), about a girl (again the daughter of Piper Laurie) with strange powers, and *Jennifer* (1978), wherein actress Lisa Pelikan utilized her psychic ability to conjure venomous snakes (!) to kill those who had tormented her in school. Another interesting variation on *Carrie* and psychic powers came from Australian director Richard Franklin in 1978. *Patrick* was the story of a comatose patient who was capable of directing mental energy at his enemies. Unlike *Carrie*, however, the sleeping Patrick was a monster through and through, evincing almost no sympathy. The weirdest telekinesis film of the 1970s may have been *Tourist Trap* (1979) which saw a nutty Chuck Connors animating grotesque mannequins with his psychic abilities...

Telekinesis was in evidence in another Brian DePalma film of the 1970s, *The Fury* (1978). Here, the government was kidnapping powerful psychics (including Andrew Stevens) and training them as assassins. A side effect of psychic powers, it seemed, was the ability to disrupt the blood flow of other human beings in close proximity.

In *The Fury*'s over-the-top finale, psychic Amy Irving focused her mental energy on government operative John Cassavetes and reduced him to bloody smithereens. The incredible special effects, which looked like Cassavetes had been wired with explosives and then detonated, were viewed in several rapid cuts for the unexpected climax. David Cronenberg followed up on many of *The Fury*'s conceits with his 1981 film, *Scanners*.

Telekinesis wasn't the only psychic power to gain film attention in the 1970s. ESP or psychic vision was the subject of *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978), a thriller in which photographer Faye Dunaway could see through the eyes of a psychotic killer (Tommy Lee Jones). Reincarnation also received a thorough once-over in Robert Wise's thoughtful film on the subject, *Audrey Rose* (1977). But if any occult happening received as much attention as vengeful telekinesis in the 1970s, it was surely spirit possession, a topic made popular by *The Exorcist* in 1973. Though the Friedkin film had involved demonic possession, many filmmakers were taken with the idea that spirits of the dead could also possess the living to right some perceived wrong in a past life.

A dead gangster possessed the living in both the blaxploitation horror film *J.D.'s Revenge* (1976) and the aforementioned Curtis Harrington picture, *Ruby*. The spirit of a powerful Indian medicine man grew out of a tumor (!) on Susan Strasberg's back in the last film directed by cult '70s icon William Girdler, *The Manitou* (1978). A man was possessed by the spirit of his dead ancestor in Dan Curtis's franchise picture, *Night of Dark Shadows* (1971), and Shirley MacLaine's brother was "taken over" by the spirit of a Puerto Rican serial killer in *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1971).

Actually, every trope of the occult and paranormal had its day in the 1970s. Alien abductions were the subject of Larry Cohen's bizarre *God Told Me To* (1976), a precursor to *The X-Files* (1993–). Big Foot sightings were the subject of the "documentary"-like low-budgeter by Charlie Pierce, *Legend of Boggy Creek* (1973), an early *Blair Witch Project* type of film.

That old cinematic favorite, the haunted house, dominated such films as *The Legend of Hell House* (1973), *Burnt Offerings* (1976), *The Haunting of Julia* (1976) and the "based on a true story" thriller *The*

Amityville Horror (1979). Each of these films was pretty interesting, and oddly, quite different from the rest. *The Legend of Hell House*, starring Roddy McDowall, perfectly staged an intellectual debate comparing science and the paranormal, while *The Amityville Horror*, based on the Jay Anson best-seller, was a more visceral, gut-punching take on haunted houses.

Even witchcraft and other “pagan” religions had their day in variety of seventies horror films. Witches and witchhunters found favor in such films as *The Blood on Satan’s Claw* (1970), Ken Russell’s *The Devils* (1971), and the incredibly violent Udo Kier vehicle *The Mark of the Devil* (1972).



The truth about Summerisle is revealed in the fiery climax of *The Wicker Man* (1971).

Genre favorite Dario Argento guided audiences to a dancing school populated by powerful witches in the Italian-made gorefest *Suspiria* (1977), a high-water mark for the director. Australian helmer Peter

Weir delved deep into “pagan” aborigine lore in a stunning film about “apocalypse” called *The Last Wave* (1977), his follow-up to the lyrical *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). And then there was *The Wicker Man* (1971), a compelling horror movie about pagan “fertility” rituals on the English island of Summerisle. The film, which starred Christopher Lee, Britt Ekland, and Edward Woodward, culminated in one of the most unexpected (but logical...) climaxes in horror history.

And the Rest

Many horror films of the 1970s defy easy categorization. *Phantasm* (1979), directed by Don Coscarelli, was an unusual effort that seemed to march to the rhythm of its own internal logic. It played out like a nightmare, featured an iconic villain (Angus Scrimm’s the Tall Man), and offered grotesque special effects (including a flying silver sphere that could drain the blood of its victims). Was it a dream? An alternate universe? A nightmare come to life? Whatever it was, *Phantasm* was beautifully done, and an affecting horror movie.

The Car (1977) was probably the weirdest *Jaws* rip-off yet imagined, because it pitted a “hellish” organism (like the great white shark in *Jaws*) against a small community and its sheriff (James Brolin). Unlike *Jaws*, however, the threat in *The Car* was clearly a machine, an automobile, and the film also included supernatural resonance. It was a strange hybrid, to be sure.

And speaking of hybrids, there was the unforgettable *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972), an AIP blaxploitation/science gone awry/car chase/comedy which had the audacity to transplant Ray Milland’s head onto Rosey Grier’s body.

Only in the ’70s.

II

The Films (by Year)

The over 225 films reviewed in this section are dated to the time of their American release. For example, some sources list *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* as being produced by Hammer in 1969, but the film didn't hit American shores (or reviewers) until 1970, hence its inclusion in this text. As critics will no doubt note, this is an American-centric text, but it also includes representative "foreign" horror films when they made an impact on the United States market, its directors, or audiences.

The films listed in this section appear alphabetically by year of American release, and most entries include several categories of information. *Critical Reception* is a sampling of '70s and contemporary reviews, *Cast & Crew* highlights the film's personnel, and the *P.O.V.* offers a pithy quotation from a talent pertinent to that film's production. *Critical Reception* and *P.O.V.* sections appear only where pertinent information is available. It is difficult, after all, to find three reviews of barely remembered films such as *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974) or *Carnival of Blood* (1971).

The *Synopsis* is a recounting of the film's story, and the *Commentary* is this author's analysis of the film in question. Some especially notable horror films, such as *Halloween* (1978), also feature a section entitled *Legacy*, which looks at the film's position in the horror pantheon beyond the 1970s.

For a handful of films—most of them genre efforts that played at local drive-ins—the *Synopsis* and *Commentary* sections have been folded into one short paragraph called *Details*. Because few of these films are available for viewing today, it was not possible to provide full information or commentary.

All the films are rated in the traditional four star system, with four stars (* * * *) being the highest rating and one star (*) the lowest.

1970

And Soon the Darkness (1970) * * *

Critical Reception

“...Everything goes well toward building tensions with understated effects. But eventually, by mere repetition, the understated effects begin to look like poverty of the imagination. Then terror becomes a function of gratuitous camera technique....”—
Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, April 5, 1970, page 44.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Pamela Franklin (Jane); Michele Dotrice (Cathy); Sandor Eles (Paul); John Nettleton (Gendarme); Clare Kelly (Schoolmistress); Hana-Marie Pravda (Madame Lassal); John Franklyn (Old Man); Claude Bertrand (Lassal); Jean Carmet (Renier).

CREW: *Production Supervisor:* Johnny Goodman. *Assistant Directors:* Ken Baker, Alain Bennett. *Continuity:* Mary Spain. *Casting Director:* Robert Lennard. *Director of Photography:* Ian Wilson. *Camera Operator:* Godfrey Godar. *Camera Assistant:* Brian Cole. *Make-up:* Gerry Fletcher. *Hairdresser:* Allan McKeown. *Sets Designed by:* Phillip Harrison. *Assistant Art Director:* Roger Christian, Eric Simon. *Wardrobe:* Roy Ponting. *Construction Manager:* Stan Gale. *Properties:* Rex Hobbs. *Editor:* Ann Chegwidden. *Sound:* Bill Rowe. *Sound Assistant:* Terry Allen. *Dubbing Editor:* Peter Lennard. *Music:* Laurie Johnson. *Original story and screenplay by:* Brian Clemens and Terry Nation. *Produced by:* Albert Fennell and Brian Clemens. *Directed by:*

Robert Fuest. Made on location in France and at the Elstree Studios of Associate British Productions Ltd., London, England. *M.P.A.A. rating: PG. Running Time: 94 minutes.*

SYNOPSIS: Two beautiful English girls, Cathy and Jane, tour rural France by bicycle. They stop at a cafe and plan their next destination when Cathy makes eyes at a mysterious Frenchman named Paul. They resume their journey and Paul blazes by them on his motor scooter. He parks and waits for them ahead, and they pass him by. When they are gone, Paul visits the grave of a young woman not far from the roadside.

Cathy and Jane stop for a rest. They discuss marriage and life until Jane decides it is time to get going ... because it will be dark soon. The girls quarrel because Cathy wants to meet Paul and catch a nap. Subsequently, Jane sets off without Cathy. Then, thinking better of it, Jane stops at the Cafe San Rivo and waits for Cathy to catch up. Madame Lassal, owner of the cafe, warns Jane that the road is "bad." This fact is proven dramatically to Cathy when she awakens from a nap and is observed by a dangerous stranger. Cathy finds her bike sabotaged and is then attacked by the stranger.

The hours pass and Jane grows worried about Cathy. She rides back to the spot off-road where her friend was resting and finds Cathy's camera, but no sign of Cathy. Paul mysteriously arrives at the same time, claiming to be a Parisian detective, and helps Jane search for her friend. Jane backtracks to another road stop and meets a British schoolmistress who warns her that a beautiful tourist was murdered on this very road three years earlier. When Jane meets up with Paul again, he tells her he has found Cathy's bike under a car in a junkyard. Jane grows suspicious of Paul and flees from him when he exposes the film in Cathy's camera, the very film that might have photographed a murderer.

Jane runs to Cafe San Rivo, gets no help, and makes her way to the gendarme's house. There, she meets the gendarme's deaf father, a weird old bird who has been wandering the road and backwoods all day. Jane tells the gendarme her story and he drives his motorcycle to Cafe San Rivo to confirm the story with the owners.

Meanwhile, Paul catches up with Jane at the gendarme's house and begs to be allowed inside. When Paul breaks into the house, Jane flees through the backyard and runs to a junkyard of trailers and derelict cars. Jane hides in a trailer as Paul hunts her down, saying he needs desperately to talk with her. As Jane hides in the closet, Cathy's dead body falls on her! Jane screams and runs from the trailer, Paul in hot pursuit. Jane fights back and strikes Paul in the face with a rock.

Just then, Jane runs into the gendarme. He comforts her for a moment, but then starts to make advances toward her. Jane realizes that the gendarme is the killer, and tries to escape. In the end, a wounded Paul comes to her aid and saves Jane from the gendarme who is also a rapist-murderer.

COMMENTARY: Penned by British fantasy television's most renowned writers Brian Clemens, who created *The Avengers*, and Terry Nation, creator of *Blake's 7* and *Doctor Who*'s popular Daleks, *And Soon the Darkness* is a suspenseful little masterpiece of the psycho-film variety. The film is admirably compact, dealing with only a handful of characters (many serve as red herrings), an isolated setting (a stretch of country road in France...) and a terribly brutal crime: the rape and murder of a beautiful tourist. From this simple template, director Robert Fuest wrings maximum shivers, proving he can accomplish his best work in a quasi-Hitchcockian framework rather than the more campy, though amusing, supernatural horror his name came to be associated with (*The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*, and *The Devil's Rain*).

Some horror/suspense films fail by attempting to stretch shallow concepts across a wide canvas when a more personal, more intimate approach seems appropriate. *And Soon the Darkness* is a film that understands this shortcoming and focuses itself on the issue at hand: a tiny stretch of road in rural France. During the course of the picture, the viewer travels this road with protagonist Jane (Pamela Franklin) so many times, back and forth almost endlessly, that even the most rudimentary landmarks (like trees and rocks) become recognizable. Yet, amazingly, the mystery deepens as viewers become more familiar with the terrain. The geography may be

plain, but the psychological geography of Cathy's murder (which Paul calls "the most unpredictable of crimes") remains hidden until the closing moments of the picture.

The consequence of traveling this particular road so frequently is that every change, every nuance in the well-explored terrain takes on significance in the mystery. What are the owners of the San Rivo Cafe burning in their garage? What is hidden in the haystack on the curb? What secret is shrouded inside the automobile junkyard behind the gendarme's house? Who is the strange figure that appears periodically (in cryptic long shot) out in the distant fields? All of these questions take on a sense of menace because director Fuest has given the film time to develop its isolated landscape before plunging into the pertinent action. Fuest is especially strong at not revealing his hand too early, and the film builds slowly enough, never pushing the tension, to allow audiences to ponder important questions.

Who is Paul and why does he follow the girls? Is it wise for Cathy and Jane to separate? Why is the gendarme so disliked by locals? How is the British school teacher, who gazes about suspiciously after offering Jane a ride, involved in Cathy's disappearance? To the film's credit, it moves forward purposefully, while hitting each note of suspense on the way to crescendo.

And Soon the Darkness also trades effectively on its conventional horror setting and situation: the road trip gone wrong. A set-up featured in many 1970s horror films, including *The Brotherhood of Satan*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Race with the Devil*, and *Tourist Trap*, the "road trip to terror" is usually an effective scenario because the audience comes to sympathize with the fish-out-of-water protagonists. While traveling, after all, everyone is a stranger. When you don't know where you are, when you don't know or understand local customs, when you are in fact, a stranger to everyone nearby, it is difficult to be sure where to go seeking help or who to trust during an emergency. *And Soon the Darkness* plays on the fear of being isolated in a strange land and becomes ever more sinister because the viewer realizes just how much he or she does not know about the locale. Like Jane, the viewer does not know who to fear and who to trust, and director Fuest ruthlessly

exploits that sympathetic uncertainty to achieve his effects. The film literally makes one tight-throated with suspense as it goes from murder to trust to mistrust, but never loses focus on its anchor: Franklin's expressive, increasingly fearful face.

And Soon the Darkness earns its suspense stripes in other ways too. The film makes use of the anxiety-provoking knowledge that sundown is inevitably approaching (hence the title), and that it would be terrible, catastrophic even, for Jane to remain in this neck of the woods as night falls. It is also a unique-looking horror film because it is set almost entirely out-of-doors, and even has a psychological complexity in dealing with reflections of the same demented personality. Two law-enforcement officials stalk that stretch of the road: both obsessed; both solitary; both wanting something from Jane. Yet only one of them is a murderer.

In all horror films, there is (consciously or unconsciously), a directorial approach: shock versus suspense. A movie can either "jolt" a viewer with surprise information, or drive a viewer up the wall by making him or her aware of how certain facts might play out. Like the best of its genre, *And Soon the Darkness* incorporates both approaches well, interspersing jolts with an air of uncertainty. The early scene in the woods wherein Cathy is killed is a notable example. The audience is aware that the girls have been followed. It is aware that Cathy and Jane have quarreled and that Jane has elected to continue her bike journey, leaving Cathy alone in a clearing. The audience has also seen the grave of a beautiful blonde girl who died on that very road. All of these facts, taken together, generate a feeling of tension or suspense: a shadowy pursuer, an opportunity to strike, and a history of violence in this place. The suspense becomes palpable when Cathy awakens from a nap and realizes that an intruder is close by, that he has sabotaged her bike and made off with her luggage (including her spare underwear...). She hears a rustling in the woods and then BOOM—the jolt, "the stinger" comes. It is just one very well handled scene in a picture of Hitchcockian purity and dimension.

The last sequence of shots in *And Soon the Darkness* serve the picture particularly well, heightening suspense, providing release, and ultimately issuing a warning to all travelers. After Jane has

grappled with her attacker (the gendarme) in high angle (expressing her entrapment), Paul rescues her. Mysteriously, the camera adopts an even higher angle, looking straight down at the action as it withdraws from the scene, the conflict resolved. As Fuest's camera glides away from Jane, now safe, and Paul, now vindicated, it gazes down briefly through the transparent sunroof of a discarded trailer (where Cathy's corpse has been stowed.) The camera glimpses part of her twisted body and the audience is reminded of the preceding horror. But then a cleansing rain falls on the window, obscuring the corpse and letting the audience know that this particular nightmare is over. Yet next, the camera cuts to the road, that same bloody road, and two innocent bikers traverse it playfully, blissfully unaware. Fuest's message is plain: this particular horror may be over, but there are others lying in wait on the road for those who are not careful. It is a stunning finale, and one that understands how camera placement and movement can convey theme and mood.

And Soon the Darkness is a terrifying venture into a foreign land, where foreign secrets threaten to reach out and strangle the innocent. The film never reveals precisely why the gendarme has turned into a homicidal rapist, but nor should it. Were we in Jane or Cathy's place, traveling gleefully on vacation in another country, we wouldn't know the answer either. And that's what makes *And Soon the Darkness* a truly frightening picture. It reminds us that what we don't know can hurt us.

The Blood on Satan's Claw (1970) * * *

Critical Reception

"...for the first hour, Piers Haggard keeps his themes and the blood flowing nicely. It begins in style.... Sadly, Haggard lets things slip and the make-up man takes over."—Adrian Turner, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 789.

"...cinematic diabolism of some style and intelligence ... a horror movie of more than routine

interest ... it contains Lovecraft's perfectly straightfaced acceptance of a universe whose natural order may, at any time, be overturned by supernatural disorder."—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, April 15, 1971, page 35.

"What makes this British movie about witchcraft ... more effective than most period horror pictures is its convincing and dramatic depiction of its historical setting.... The script may fall down in spots, but the well-crafted mood ... still manages to carry the ball."—Dr. Cyclops, *Fangoria* #30, October, 1983, page 44.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Patrick Wymark (the Judge); Linda Hayden (Angel Blake); Barry Andrews (Ralph Gower); Michele Dotrice (Margaret); James Hayter (Squire Middleton); Anthony Ainley (Reverend Fallowfield); Howard Goorney (the Doctor); Avice Landon (Isobel Banham); Charlotte Mitchell (Ellen); Wendy Padbury (Cathy Vespers); Tamara Ustinov (Rosalind Barton); Simon Williams (Peter Edmonton); Robin Davies (Mark Vespers).

CREW: Dennis Friedland and Christopher C. Dewey Present a Tigon British/Chilton Film Production. *Music composed and conducted by:* Marc Wilkinson. *Art Director:* Arnold Chapkis. *Editor:* Richard Best. *Production Manager:* Ron Jackson. *Assistant Director:* Stephen Christian. *Camera Operator:* Dudley Lovell. *Sound Mixer:* Tony Dawe. *Sound Editor:* Bill Trent. *Dubbing Mixer:* Ken Barker. *Casting Director:* Weston Drury, Jr. *Set Dresser:* Milly Burns. *Continuity:* Josie Fulford. *Make-up:* Eddie Knight. *Hairdresser:* Olga Angelinetta. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Dulcie Midwinter. *Focus Puller:* Mike Rutter. *Grip:* Peg Hall. *Titles and Opticals:* General Screen Enterprises Ltd. *Processed by:* Rank Film Labs, Denham. *Director of*

Photography: Dick Bush. *Executive Producer:* Tony Tenser. *Original Screenplay by:* Robert Wynne-Simmons. *With additional material by:* Piers Haggard. *Produced by:* Peter L. Andrews, Malcolm B. Heyworth. *Directed by:* Piers Haggard. Made at Pinewood Studios, England, and on location.
M.P.A.A. Rating: R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In 1670, young Ralph Gower is plowing the Edmonton field when he unearths a bizarre, inhuman skull in the mud. He reports his finding to the Judge, an official visiting from London, but his report is dismissed when the skull mysteriously vanishes. Meanwhile, young Peter Edmonton has brought his fiancée, Rosalind, to the farm. She is to spend the night in an attic room, but once darkness falls, Rosalind goes crazy, terrified of some dark presence in the room. The next morning she is carted off to an insane asylum ... her hand transformed into a hairy, pointed claw. Peter's aunt, scratched by Rosalind's clawed digits, then disappears ... not to be found anywhere.

Peter becomes convinced that evil is free in his small parish, even as the judge returns to London to research the possibility of witchcraft and Satanism in the small rural hamlet. Soon, other villagers are cursed by the claw of Satan. While frolicking in the Edmonton field, beautiful teen Angel Blake also finds a satanic claw ... and becomes possessed with evil. She attempts to seduce the Reverend Fallowfield, but he rejects her advances. Later, she accuses him of raping her, and the town squire believes the charges. This witch hunt gives Angel and her strange satanic cult the time it needs to grow and spread among the youngsters of the parish.

Before long, the virtuous young are becoming minions of evil. Kathy Vespers is raped and killed for bearing the mark of the devil (a hairy tuft on her back), and another boy, Mark, is found murdered at the bottom of a woodpile. Ralph, terrified at the terror his discovery has wrought, seeks to protect Margaret, a girl being hunted as a witch. He finds, to his horror, that she too bears the mark of the devil and asks the local doctor to cut it out. Even with the hairy deformity lopped off, Margaret still confesses her allegiance to the Dark One, and Ralph realizes that she is truly a

devil worshiper. Soon, the forests outside town are too dangerous to traverse, and devil rites are held by night with Angel Blake presiding.

Peter visits the judge in London, who declares he is ready to return and defeat the growing evil. He sets out with vicious dogs to hunt the devil and his kindred. Meanwhile, the morally upright citizens of town form a mob to burn the witches. Ralph, hoping to stop the evil, visits the Edmonton attic, is confronted by a dark specter ... and is then prepared for a satanic ceremony. Before Ralph can be sacrificed, the witch hunters (led by the judge) interfere in the rite, killing Angel Blake. Satan himself is stabbed by the stalwart judge with a sword, and then hurled into a fire.

COMMENTARY: Piers Haggard's *The Blood on Satan's Claw* transports the viewer to a world without sunlight, and consequently without hope. In this strikingly photographed horror picture, all light is a cold blue, deathly as it were, and every color is distinctly faded ... as if life itself has been bled out of reality. This icy look, coupled with a very accurate, very detailed art design, is the film's greatest advantage. Never for a moment is the viewer required to leave the reality of the historical period for lack of accuracy or believability. For better or worse, the audience inhabits the English parish besieged by evil, and that grounding in a specific place ultimately plays in the film's favor. In keeping with the look of the film, *The Blood on Satan's Claw's* plot is less than linear, less than coherent even, and the story is muddled and confusing at times. But, in horror the story is not always as paramount as the texture or mood established, and in this regard, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* clearly excels. Its bleak visage is a memorable one, and echoed by the particulars of its story.

A world without hope is the terrain of *The Blood on Satan's Claw*. The sun—a warm, welcoming, bright source of light that casts hopeful yellow illumination—is never seen in this picture. Skies are overcast and slate gray. But the absence of the sun is not the only element in the film that reflects hopelessness and death. As the film opens, young Ralph Gower tends to a field. All around him in that fallow field is overturned mud, earth, and dirt, but importantly no greens, no bright colors whatsoever. Even behind him, the green of

the foliage is washed out to a muted gray. Appropriately, the demon skull is found in this spot, which the color palette informs the audience is quite dead. Nothing will grow from that earth except evil.

In the same sequence, young Cathy Vespers greets Ralph, and Haggard's camera adopts a position behind her, amidst the woods. This beautiful young girl (Wendy Padbury—Zoe of *Doctor Who*), is seen through the lifeless branches of dead trees. The lack of leaves, of vegetation, again cements the impression of a cold, dead world (or season) where life does not flourish. In keeping with this motif of pallor and death, Ralph discovers not a bud blooming in the Edmonton field, but the skull of an ancient "fiend." The land has brought up only a flower of death, and soon that death will spread across the rural landscape like ivy, infecting all it touches.

There can be no hope, no future, in a world where the children (the torchbearers in human terms) are lost, and *The Blood on Satan's Claw* continues the metaphor of hope murdered by making it the children (or the young adults, anyway) who are contaminated by evil first. It is no accident that the children are corrupted initially, because their conversion to evil signals the death of the future, hence the death of a better tomorrow, or any tomorrow at all. Virginal Angel Blake is transformed into a lusty whore, forsaking the church to bring down the virtuous (in her attempted seduction of Reverend Fallowfield). The transformation to evil is played out on her very face; it is darkened by overarching black eyebrows, a stark contrast to the sunny blond hair that informs her young beauty. Likewise, Cathy Vespers, a humble servant girl of solid character, is deflowered, robbed of her virtue, and killed in her prime. Even the level-headed Ralph succumbs to the spreading evil, only to be rescued by the judge at the last minute. And those children who do not die outright (such as poor Rosalind) are tainted forever by madness, doomed to fruitless lives of incarceration and mental illness. Thus Haggard has visually killed hope (with the washed out, lifeless look of the picture) and metaphorically done so to boot, by targeting the future in the form of the next generation. It goes without saying that the adults represent a kind of emptiness. The reverend, a man purportedly representing God, is named "Fallowfield," a synonym for "empty." Adults, and even religious

faith, offer nothing but dogma.

The Blood on Satan's Claw is a bizarre, frightening film despite the meandering of its plot, emerging as a creepy, atmospheric nose-dive into the irrational (and anti-rational). Accordingly, some of the scenes in the picture are genuinely frightening. Early in the film, Rosalind sleeps in the dark Edmonton attic, and the film plays on that primal human fear that there is something malevolent waiting for us in the blackness of night. In this case, that fear is well grounded, and the film only hints at the precise appearance and nature of this evil: a flash of dark motion in a dark room, a glimpse of something hairy and animal-like, before the silence at midnight is punctuated by terrified shrieks.

Two other characters, Peter and Ralph, journey to that attic (at night as well, naturally) in due order, and each occasion is similarly terrifying. The monster inhabiting that room seems to exist in barely lit corners, under floorboards, beside the bed ... waiting. To some, this notion of an old evil infecting our reality is representative of a Lovecraftian order, but fear of the dark is a universal dread, one exploited by *The Blood on Satan's Claw*.

Oddly, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* does not unfold in the dogmatic manner of its brethren horror films. As viewers, we have all been conditioned to expect things at certain times, and to feel certain ways when images of terror pop up. This movie defies that training and marches along to its own unusual rhythm. If the plot does not exactly make literal sense that too seems a reflection of its content. In its tale of a diabolical world order inexplicably and irrevocably replacing our own, the film kills reason, rationality and science. Characters change into monsters with no prologue, demons shrouded in hoods prowl the forests, the virtuous become deviant, and there is nary an explanation in sight. The spread of evil seems random and rampant, nonsensical even. Yet what better way to depict a world without hope than to murder those very things which provide man a measure of solace in this mortal coil? The comfort of reasonable scientific explanation, of faith even, is denied the audience.

In its depiction of an anti-rational spread of pure evil, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* generates real psychological discomfort. Why is this

outbreak occurring here, now? Why and how are people succumbing so rapidly? The movie denies all impulses to frame answers, and audiences are left with a perplexing, but ultimately rewarding meditation on the fact that it is the essence of the human condition not to have answers. Existence is mysterious, and our physics are but human constructs designed to explain these enigmas. But, in the end, explanations are merely constructs, and oddities and anomalies, like an inhuman skull unearthed in the mud, have a way of popping up and shattering the delusion that we understand our universe.

As a witch hunt movie, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* is quite interesting because it takes a stance opposite from the majority of its brethren (such as *The Devils* [1971], *Mark of the Devil* [1972], and *The Crucible* [1996]). In those instances, there are no witches, and the witch-hunters are depicted as self-righteous opportunists and demagogues out to destroy that which they do not approve. In this film, the judge (Wymark) is heroic, and there truly are witches loose in the woods. Again, this is interesting only in that it is an unconventional take on timeworn material. This movie is not out to make a social comment about paranoia, the mob mentality, politics or the like. Its scope is actually grander. It wants viewers to question their assumptions about reality and reveal a world where sunlight (and reason) don't penetrate.

Though populated by too many bland characters and saddled with far too many irrelevant, seemingly unconnected incidents, as well as weak make-up for the demon (only briefly glimpsed), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* is a film that generates a feeling of unease. Though good is vindicated in the abrupt finale, there is the sense that this evil flower could blossom again, that malevolence has not been stamped out. It is a gray, hopeless, and frightening motion picture, and in that way, quite effective as horror.

Bram Stoker's Count Dracula (*El Conde Dracula*) (1970) * *

Critical Reception

“*Count Dracula* ... despite claims of being completely faithful, is a complete mess.... Lee

makes the most he can of the opportunity, but the shabby production values defeat him in the end....”—Steve Biodrowski, *Cinefantastique* Volume 23, #4: “Dracula The Oft Told Story,” December 1992, page 29.

“It was a good idea to attempt an exact filming of Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel, but Franco and producer Harry Alan Towers clearly weren’t up to the task.... The film proceeds clumsily and looks disgustingly cheap.... Lee’s performance is authoritative but loses its edge under the deadpan stare of Manuel Merino’s inept camera....”—Tim Lucas, *Fangoria* #78: “The Agony and the Ecstasy of Jess Franco” (Part I); page 18.

“...demonstrates none of the flair and ingenuity of Badham’s *Dracula* and none of the unpretentious craft of Fisher’s [Hammer] vampire films.... Problems with sound synchronization, dubbing dialogue and inappropriate locations ... often turn this film into unintentionally humorous camp.”—Gregory A. Waller, *The Living and the Undead: From Stoker’s Dracula to Romero’s Dawn of the Dead*, 1986, page 136.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Count Dracula); Herbert Lom (Professor Van Helsing); Klaus Kinski (Renfield); Maria Rohm (Mina); Frederick Williams (Jonathan Harker); Soledad Miranda (Lucy); Jack Taylor (Quincy Morris); Paul Muller (Dr. Seward).

CREW: *Photographed by:* Manuel Merino. *Assistant Director:* John Thompson. *Art Director:* George O’Brown. *Production Manager:* Jose Climent. *Editor:* Derek Parsons. *Sound Editor:* Joyce Oxley. *Music:* Bruno Nicolai. *Editor:* Derek Parsons. *Screenplay by:* Peter Weibeck. *Produced by:* Harry Alan Towers.

Directed by: Jess Franco. A Towers of London
Production.

SYNOPSIS: In 1897, a young lawyer from London, Jonathan Harker, boards a train for Transylvania to visit with a new client, Count Dracula. A fellow passenger on the train and the wife of an innkeeper in Transylvania warn Harker not to visit the strange count on St. George's night because it is a bad omen. Harker ignores these warnings and proceeds. In the dark of the night, he is picked up by Dracula's carriage and driven to a magnificent castle. On the way, wolves bay in the woods, and the mysterious carriage driver—Dracula himself—clears them away with a supernatural power.

Jonathan arrives at the castle of Dracula and notes that his host casts no reflection. Ignoring this oddity, Harker gets down to the business at hand: Dracula wants to purchase land in London, specifically Carfax Abbey. Meanwhile, Dracula spies a photograph of Harker's beautiful fiancée, Mina, and her lovely friend Lucy, and his old blood is subsequently stirred to devilish new action. Harker is locked in his room for the evening, and then captured by three brides of Dracula—all vampires. Dracula prevents the women from feeding on his guest, and the women hungrily drink a baby's blood instead.

The next morning, Harker awakens with two puncture marks on his neck and realizes that his escape from the lair of Dracula is a matter of life and death. After discovering Dracula asleep in a coffin, Harker jumps out a window and is carried away to safety on the currents of a river.

Some time later, a demented Jonathan Harker arrives at the private clinic of Professor Van Helsing and Dr. Seward in London, just across the street from Carfax Abbey. Harker is not the only one to rave about the power of Dracula. Another patient, Renfield, has also been driven mad by his encounter with the demonic count. Soon, Mina and Lucy visit the clinic to check on Harker, and decide to remain there until he is well. But by night, Dracula summons Lucy, calling her out onto the grounds of the clinic. Mina follows the mesmerized Lucy and finds her victimized: her neck drained of blood! Learning of Lucy's desperate condition, her fiancé, Quincy Morris, arrives to give his beloved a much-needed blood

transfusion.

That night, Dracula strikes again. He steals into Lucy's room and dines on the blood from her sweet neck until Mina interrupts. Meanwhile, Van Helsing tells Quincy Morris and the rapidly recovering Jonathan Harker that poor Renfield's daughter was the victim of a mythological creature known as a vampire.

Furthermore, Van Helsing believes Dracula to be that vampire: an undead creature of the night capable of maintaining eternal youth by feeding on the blood of the innocent. He also fears that poor Lucy, dead from Dracula's consumption, will return to life as a vampire herself. This is a more accurate guess than he realizes; Lucy has already risen from her coffin and feasted on the blood of a young girl! That night, Van Helsing, Morris and Harker visit Lucy's mausoleum and drive a stake through her heart to prevent any further resurrection from the grave.

Dracula sets his vampiric sights on Mina, and attacks her at the opera. Aware that Van Helsing and the others are onto him, the Prince of Darkness decides it is time to return to Transylvania, and books passage on a ship bound for Varna. While Van Helsing remains behind to protect Mina from Dracula's deadly attentions, Morris, Seward and Harker race to Transylvania in an attempt to beat the count to his castle. They successfully interrupt his journey and burn Dracula's body while he sleeps peacefully in a coffin. Dracula ages hundreds of years in just seconds, and finally dies.

COMMENTARY: Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* is to horror films what William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is to the theatre and film: a great work of art revisited time and again across the decades, always a bit different from previous incarnations, but always the same in important ways too. And, like *Hamlet*, the primary interest in any adaptation of *Dracula* is the portrayal of the lead role. Every new actor who essays either the Prince of Denmark or the Prince of Darkness injects a fresh spin on the familiar material. And, audiences never grow fatigued with the different cadences and nuances in such updatings.

On the silver screen there have been at least three significant Hamlets: Laurence Olivier in 1948, Mel Gibson in 1990 and Kenneth Branagh in 1997. There have been even more Count

Draculas (Bela Lugosi in 1931, Lon Chaney, Jr. in 1943, John Carradine in 1944, Christopher Lee in 1958, David Niven in 1973, Udo Kier in 1974, Frank Langella in 1979 and Gary Oldman in 1992). On TV, Jack Palance and Louis Jordan have had the honor of portraying the famous vampire.

If one is of the opinion that both versions of *Nosferatu* (1922 and 1979 respectively) are also variations on the Dracula myth, horror's equivalent of Hamlet has been produced for film a staggering number of times. *Dracula* (1931), *The Horror of Dracula* (1958), *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula* (1970), *Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974), *Dracula* (1979), and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) all employ the characters and situations outlined in Stoker's seminal book. If one adds the sequels, spin-offs and such, the appearances of horror's Hamlet increase geometrically. *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Son of Dracula* (1943), *House of Dracula* (1944), *Dracula—Prince of Darkness* (1965), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (1968), *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972), *Dracula's Dog* (1978), and *Dracula's Widow* (1988) are a few such titles.

When one delves further, matters get even more bizarre: the regal count has been a porn star in vehicles such as *Dracula Sucks* (1978) and *Dracula Blows His Cool* (1979) and, in an even less dignified moment, he co-starred in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* [1948])! *Blacula* (1972), *Love at First Bite* (1979), and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It!* (1995) represent other twists on the oft-repeated mythos.

Why is Dracula so popular a story to dramatize on film? The answers are numerous. Like Hamlet, Dracula can be interpreted as a tragedy. Dracula, once a great and noble warrior, is doomed to an eternal half-life spent feeding on the living, and his great love always eludes him. Depending on the version, Dracula can be seen primarily not as horror, but a love story which "crosses oceans of time," (*Dracula* [1979], *Bram Stoker's Dracula* [1992]).

Other answers have less to do with literature and romance and more to do with plain old lust. Those who seek to analyze Dracula's popularity inevitably find themselves discussing the "the blood is the life" notion of the novel and its numerous adaptations. Specifically, Dracula steals the bodily fluid of beautiful women,

enslaving them to his will. He is a charming seducer, a foreigner, who, inevitably, saves the beautiful Mina (or Lucy, depending on interpretation) at least briefly from a life of domestic boredom with the oh-so-stolid Jonathan Harker. Dracula is the perfect last fling before marriage: a sexual partner who promises great pleasures and then who conveniently dies, thus allowing his lovers to return to more “appropriate” life styles. A tragic love-story and a Victorian sexual adventure, *Dracula* is also about man’s quest for immortality, something moviegoers of every generation can relate to.

And, at a basic level *Dracula* is a simple horror story: good versus evil, man versus monster. *Dracula* is also perfect film fodder because it has a powerful central role (the count himself), multiple beautiful women (Mina, Lucy and brides of Dracula), and an opportunity for an abundance of special effects (Dracula can be wolf, bat, man, or fog). What’s not to like?

Since *Dracula* has been dramatized so frequently, it is hard to put a new spin on the story. It is difficult, if not impossible, to shock audiences with a story they are already familiar with. And that fact, at long last, brings to mind Jess Franco’s 1970 production, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. As the film opens, a title card reveals that “for the first time” filmmakers are intent on re-telling Bram Stoker’s story “exactly as he wrote” it.

In other words, the twist evident here is a high degree of faithfulness to the source material. In *Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula* this faithfulness is primarily demonstrated in that the early part of the novel, Harker’s adventure at the Castle of Dracula, has been re-inserted. Most Dracula films dispense with this section of Stoker’s text, and skip immediately to Victorian England and the Count’s arrival there. So, it is a delight to report that *Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula* does restore this section of the novel, and in fact, it is the most interesting portion of the film. If Franco’s intent is to remain faithful to Stoker, then one can see why certain choices have been made. Christopher Lee’s count wears all black and is decked out in a moustache—touches straight from Stoker. And, Lee even gets to mouth authentic dialogue (about Dracula’s lineage in regards to Attila the Hun) from the novel. In a bow to realism, Lee’s Count is equipped with pointed fangs at all times. In other words, his

vampire teeth are not retractable as in most versions of the story, lowering and appearing only when he comes in for the kill.

So earnest and respectful is director Franco in his attempt to make his *Count Dracula* faithful to Stoker that he presents what could be termed the most restrained version of the story yet. There are no surreal special effects or showy film techniques in the picture, and that might be considered a good thing. Some of the crazy effects and jumpy film techniques orchestrated by Francis Ford Coppola in his 1992 version transformed the story of Dracula into a freak show, so it is nice that such a path is not chosen here.

In addition, histrionics among the cast of *Count Dracula* have been discouraged. All of the actors are mightily restrained, to the degree that even the deranged Renfield is affected by the overarching air of respect and dignity for the material. Most frequently in film, Renfield is depicted as a crazy blabberer, but Kinski's interpretation is that of a silent brooder, a man more sullen than animated with fear. Herbert Lom is so taciturn and restrained as Van Helsing that in one crucial scene it is impossible to tell if he has suffered from a narcoleptic attack, is merely resting his eyes, or (as is actually the case) has suddenly suffered the effects of a debilitating stroke!

Christopher Lee makes for a remarkable Dracula, as usual, but he is not in the picture as much as one would hope. He is almost a guest star, appearing occasionally and then vanishing from the goings-on for interminable stretches. The inevitable result of such a restrained, respectful treatment is that *Count Dracula* becomes totally and utterly lifeless—a bore, in fact.

Once the die has been cast, and Franco has chosen what might be deemed the high road (faithfulness, restraint and respect for the material), he is left with perilously few options. Above all, a horror movie is intended to scare or thrill. Unfolding at a leisurely pace and flattened out by minimalist performances, *Count Dracula* is lacking in thrills, romance and fear. Lucy is played as a zombie who virtually surrenders at the drop of a hat to Dracula, and since there is never a bond formed between Mina and Dracula there is no romance either. Because the performances are so spare, the motivations of the characters seem missing in this version of *Dracula*. The count sees a picture of Mina and Lucy early in the

picture and then goes to London to “take them” for reasons known only to him. In other versions of the film, Mina and the count share a timeless kind of love, or at least a powerful, seductive relationship. There is no such eroticism or suggestion of affection here, much to the film’s detriment.

The decision to make a “realistic” Dracula without the surreal, and without hint of the Gothic, also results in the most lifeless finale to a vampire film ever put to celluloid. Seward, Morris and Harker catch Dracula sleeping and burn him in his coffin. *The end*. There is no feeling of relief (because no terror or suspense has been generated) and no sense of accomplishment or victory either.

The horror film is a tricky game: too little respect for the genre and its conventions and filmmakers end up with an ugly exploitation that pleases no one; too much respect for old material (as evidenced here) drains the life and inspiration out of a film and renders it stodgy. Jess Franco re-tells *Dracula* as though he, as director, is incidental to what unfolds on screen and Stoker’s vision has apparently been substituted for his own creative input. *Count Dracula* may be faithful to a greater degree than many other Dracula films, but the film is so basic, so lacking in inspiration that it advances the Dracula legend not a bit. It could have been made in 1931 or 1958 because no new thought or inspiration (even as far as execution of the standard special effects) has been included. In horror, there are films that push the envelope, look forward to the future, and carry the genre to new edges. In the seventies, such films were *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Carrie* (1976) and even *The Last House on the Left* (1972). Unfortunately, there are also those horror films that look backward and seem dated almost the moment they are released. If not for the technique *Count Dracula* most frequently deploys (zooms), the movie could have been made (and made better) by Hammer Studios in 1959.

One element of *Count Dracula* that dates it to the 1970s is the pervasive use of the zoom lens. In the seventies, zooms were terribly overused. As a result, most films made today shun the zoom as a laughable technique. The zoom is disliked by many cinematographers and directors because it distorts the edges of the

frame as it does its thing, moving in or out. Today, zooms are utilized mostly to generate campy effect. A quick zoom in on somebody's face can generate a scare or a laugh, if done just right. *Count Dracula*, unfortunately, is mired in zooms.

Franco zooms in on wolves, zooms out from the castle, zooms in on Dracula's eyes, zooms out from candelabras, zooms in on Lucy's catatonic face, zooms in on bars from Renfield's cell (and gets so close that the bars actually go out of focus then flicker back and forth, in and out of focus), *ad nauseam*, *ad infinitum*. When used sparingly and suddenly, a zoom can have dramatic and meaningful visual effect: shock! surprise! horror! But in *Count Dracula* Franco most often zooms at the slowest possible velocity, making his shots utterly predictable. The audience understands from the start how the zoom shots will end (either pulling back, or closing in), and thus long passages become waiting games as the camera endlessly zeroes in or backs up.

Often, it is unclear why a zoom is being used at all. A zoom is a useful technique in formalist film because it pinpoints something important to the audience—a detail, a face, a view. When used all the time, the zoom loses its potency because it is pinpointing every detail—often to the bewilderment of viewers.

Franco is not well served by the editing of the picture either. Much of the action of the film occurs in Van Helsing's clinic. One or two exterior shots of the clinic are appropriate. Strangely, the editor shows the same establishing shot of the clinic no less than five times during the duration of the picture, and holds on the familiar view for at least five or six seconds too long on each occurrence.

Another grave miscalculation is the ludicrous scene in which a bevy of stuffed and mounted animals come to life in Carfax Abbey. Not only are there too many blurry zooms in this sequence (a flaw, alas, of the entire film), but it is obvious that a stagehand is moving these lifeless creatures incrementally, just out of camera range. There is no sense that the animals are "animated" by the evil of Dracula, only the clear perception that a hand is twisting these stiff little critters back and forth. On top of all that, there are a multitude of zooms and close-ups, which only succeed in making the sequence last at least a minute too long. An editor cognizant of

pace and fluent in the language of shock (which demands that scary things be shown once or twice but not repetitively), would have trimmed this scene.

Another editing blunder finds Lucy in the middle of her bed in one shot and at least seven or eight inches from the center of the bed in the very next. So continuity is not a strong point either. With all of these editing and technical missteps, the only moments that really come alive in *Count Dracula* are the two occasions in which the camera is untethered, and Franco generates an unsteady feeling from the use of a hand-held. Lucy's pursuit of an innocent girl and Dracula's final attack on Lucy both use this technique well.

Oddly, scenes that should be occurring at night are lensed in the daytime and blue skies and clouds are visible overhead. Some Franco defenders would no doubt argue that this is another example of the director's faithfulness to his source. After all, in Stoker, Dracula was not "allergic" to sunlight (that allergy was invented for the 1922 Murnau film *Nosferatu*), and so it is perfectly appropriate for the heroes of this Dracula film to be skulking around the castle by daylight. That answer does not hold up, however, with the details of the individual scenes. When first mesmerized by the count, Lucy awakes from a deep sleep and heads out into the grounds—daylight obvious above her. Was she just napping in the afternoon, or was this scene really supposed to be lensed at night?

Secondly, when Seward, Morris and Harker stalk Dracula, they are carrying a lantern. If the scene is not meant to be happening at night, why bring an artificial light source along?

It has been widely reported that Christopher Lee participated in this film because it was to be a faithful rendering of Bram Stoker's timeless novel. Though the final result is faithful, to a high degree, the audience walks away feeling neither thrilled nor excited by *Count Dracula*, but bored. The cast is excellent (Lom, Lee and Kinski—what a combo!), the musical score is terrific, and Franco's sincere approach is appreciated, but *Count Dracula* is like a Cliffs Notes version of Stoker. It provides all the information one might need to know to pass a test about Dracula, but a successful artistic approach to the classic material is absent.

Count Yorga, Vampire (1970) * * ½

Critical Reception

“...the special appeal of *Count Yorga, Vampire* may well be its Los Angeles locale.... *Count Yorga*’s ambience is pure Hollywood and the seamy elegance of Robert Quarry’s performance ... exactly compliments [sic] that ambience. Bob Kelljan’s direction, often resourceful, does especially well by Quarry’s disdainful civility....”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, November 12, 1970, page 49.

“...primitive, but not unimaginative.”—Tom Charity, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 181.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Robert Quarry (Count Yorga); Roger Perry (Dr. Jim Hayes); Michael Murphy (Paul); Michael Macready (Michael); Donna Anders (Donna); Judith Lang (Erica); Edward Walsh (Brudeh); George Macready (Narrator); Julie Connors, Paul Hansen, Sybil Scotford, Marsha Jordan, Deborah Darnell.

CREW: American International Pictures Presents *Count Yorga, Vampire*, an Erica Production.
Production Supervisor: Robert N. O’Neil. *Camera Assistant:* Pat O’Mara, Jr. *Chief Electrician:* John Murphy. *Wardrobe:* Nancy Stone. *Property Master:* James Stinson. *Animal Owner/Trainer:* Vee Kasegan. *Script Supervisor:* Pat Townsend. *Sound Assistant:* George Garrin. *Set Design:* Bob Wilder. *Make-up:* Mark Rogers, Master Dentalsmith. *Special Effects:* James Tanerbaum. *Sound Recorder:* Robert Dietz, Lowell Brown. *Sound Effects:* Edit International. *Rerecording:* Producers Sound Services, Inc. *Color:* Movielab. *Film Editor:* Tony de Zarraga. *Cinematography:* Arch Achambault. *Music:* William

Marx. *Produced by:* Michael Macready. *Written and Directed by:* Bob Kelljan. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.
Running Time: 92 minutes.

P.O.V.

“I was fighting against the Bela Lugosi image and Christopher Lee’s Dracula. Not that there was anything wrong with either one of them, but they were unreal in a certain way, and I wanted to give Yorga kind of reality and play him straight”¹.—
Robert Quarry discusses his interpretation of the modern vampire in *Count Yorga* (1970).

SYNOPSIS: In contemporary Los Angeles, a group of hip young adults gather for a séance in an attempt to contact the recently deceased mother of Donna, one of their number. Unfortunately, the medium selected on this occasion is none other than Count Yorga, a modern-day vampire living in the City of Angels. While the others watch, Yorga secretly enslaves Donna with his powers of telepathy.

After the séance, Erica and Paul agree to drive Yorga home in their van, while Donna wonders why the count was not present at her mother’s funeral, as he insists. After dropping Yorga off at his secluded mansion, Erica and Paul find their VW van trapped in the mud on a dark road. They are forced to spend the night there. They make love in the back of the van, but afterwards, Yorga attacks. Paul is knocked unconscious, without remembering his assailant, and Erica is bitten by the vampire.

The next day, Paul notices the odd puncture marks on Erica’s neck and takes her to see Dr. Hayes. Later, when Hayes and Paul find Erica drinking the blood of a kitten, Hayes suggests there is a vampire at work. Understandably, Paul is doubtful such a thing could happen in modern L.A. But that night, the hypnotic Yorga summons Erica. She awakens, lustful, and he offers her eternal life as one of his vampire brides. When Erica agrees, Yorga takes her back to his castle. In hot pursuit, Paul, Dr. Hayes and Donna’s boyfriend, Michael, try to save Erica before it is too late. Paul arrives first and is murdered by Yorga’s brutish manservant. When,

Dr. Hayes, Michael and Donna arrive at the castle, there is no sign of Paul. Suspecting that Yorga is a vampire, Hayes attempts to keep the vampire awake with polite conversation until daylight. He even asks the count if vampires are real. Yorga's response is chilling. Vampires are real, he concludes, and they are far superior to human beings. When Yorga retires just before the deadly rays of sunrise, Hayes and Michael plot to kill him the following evening.

The next day, Yorga calls to the enslaved Donna, ordering her to his house. When she arrives, Donna suffers a worse indignity than Yorga's domination: Brudeh, the brute manservant, forces himself on her. Later, Michael and Hayes storm the house to rescue her. In the cellar, Hayes and Yorga engage in battle, but Yorga's vampire brides (including the transformed Erica) rise and feed on the good doctor. Desperate and alone, Michael attempts to dispatch Yorga and save his beloved Donna. He kills Brudeh and then finds Hayes, barely alive. Hayes informs him that Donna is locked up safely upstairs, where Yorga has reintroduced her to her dead mother—now a vampire bride.

Taking action, Michael impales the monstrous mother, then Yorga himself. As Michael and Donna attempt to escape, they are confronted by two vampire brides. Just as Michael's escape looks to be assured, he faces a nasty shock: Donna is already a vampire.

COMMENTARY: There are two ways in which one might assess *Count Yorga, Vampire* (actually, onscreen, *Count Iorga Vampire*). By looking at it in 1970 terms, the film would garner a (reservedly) positive review for the manner in which it inches forward the notion of vampires dwelling in a modern technological society. But studied in Y2K terms, *Yorga* seems distinctly old hat, offering precious few twists and turns on the well-established canon of vampire lore. Of course, one goal in critiquing these films in the year 2001 is to study their accomplishments within their historical context, at the time of release, so perhaps it is not fair to expect *Yorga* to appear innovative after thirty years in circulation.

After all, it is easy to forget that in the year 1970, vampire films were invariably set in Victorian times—or the 1930s at the latest. Hammer's *Dracula* (Christopher Lee) had not voyaged to the present yet (*Dracula A.D. 1972* would usher in that development) and

Kolchak's face-off with Janos Skorzeny in the popular TV movie *The Night Stalker* (1971) was another year off. Contemporary visions like *The Hunger* (1982), *Fright Night* (1985), *The Lost Boys* (1987), *A Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995), *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1998) and *Blade* (1998) were a long, long way off too. So, *Count Yorga's* central plot twist, bringing a vampire to 1970s California was, if not revolutionary, at least ahead of the curve. In fact, *Yorga's* identity as a vampire not Dracula (or one of his brides or many offspring) might even be considered trail-blazing in a way. Before *Yorga*, vampires and Dracula were pretty much synonymous. *Yorga's* a very different cat.

On the other hand, the best 1970s horror films (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, *The Exorcist*, *Jaws*, even *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* and *Last House on the Left*) do retain their aura of inspiration and innovation even in the opening days of the 21st century, decades after their release. *Count Yorga* is clearly not in that class. It lacks the directorial flair of a true classic, and substitutes camp humor for chills at its most critical junctures. Though it is fun to hear Quarry's *Yorga* declare that he'll "have a snack later," or to watch as a VW van, a symbol of the hippie generation, is molded into a vehicle of action, the film skimps on the thrills and charts a bland, ultimately unsatisfying course. It is a cheap film, and one feels that budgetary limitations hampered its ability to thrill on a significant level.

Count Yorga opens in almost amateurish fashion as a narrator describes the arrival of a modern-day vampire in California. As this breathy narrator relates the story, the film's images reveal a crate being lowered onto a pick-up truck, and the truck then heading out on a sprawling American highway. Oddly, the narration is unnecessary, as is the opening sequence: *Yorga* has obviously been in the States for some time when the plot proper begins, so what does the arrival of his coffin (we presume it is his, anyway) have to do with this story? Why is it necessary to show that *Yorga* came from Europe, when all the action takes place in the United States? *Blacula* took a different, and more coherent, tack in 1972: revealing the origin of *Blacula* in Europe and then dramatizing how he came to be re-awakened in the United States. *Yorga's* opening feels more like an attempt to pad the running time than a legitimate jumping

off point for the story.

Still, *Count Yorga* has some fun, effective moments, as though a bunch of artists got together and decided what they would want to see happen in a vampire movie. Thus wooden stakes are fashioned from broken broom handles, a weak vampire sucks on a kitten to gain nourishment, and the film's highpoint is a reasoned, rational conversation between vampire and vampire hunter. All of these moments, particularly the well-acted confrontation between Roger Perry and Robert Quarry, speak to a real creativity on the part of *Yorga's* production team, but these flashes of inspiration (as well as the groovy 1970s touches) serve an old story that looks back rather than forward.

For instance, when Paul learns of Jim's suspicion that Yorga is a vampire, he is completely dismissive, even though Jim's theory perfectly fits all the facts. This is the movie automatic pilot answer to such a situation, not a genuine one arising out of character. People are being felled by pernicious anemia after showing up sick with puncture marks on their neck, and a blood specialist says they have been drained of blood. And, on top of that, your girlfriend is found sucking the blood of a helpless kitten ... with fangs!!? Could it be a vampire? The obvious answer is yes, but *Count Yorga's* script feels obliged, wrongly, to kowtow to the old movie cliché stating that reasonable characters should disbelieve in vampires (thus allowing the ghouls the opportunity to continue killing...). Yet, here, as in most such stories, the facts happen to fit Jim's thesis.

Ironically, *Count Yorga's* strengths and weaknesses can be found side by side in one particular scene. Yorga stalks two young people as they make love in their VW van. There are long pans across the darkness, the noise of crickets on the soundtrack, and the camera adopts the eerie, subjective, P.O.V. angle, closing in on the unaware innocents. The sound of the crickets turns to a loud screech when the camera focuses on Yorga, lit from below, as he stands outside the window, waiting to attack. It is a very effective and suspenseful moment until the actual attack comes. Then it becomes plain that Yorga is garbed in a black suit and a long, flowing cape ... a cliché of vampire films that has lost the power to scare.

Somehow, the image of the 19th century vampire is not really scary

anymore. The well orchestrated approach to terror, mixing an appropriate camera angle, well-used sound effects and creepy lighting, is finally undercut by an image out of place in modern Los Angeles: an old guy in a cape with pointed teeth. In the '80s and '90s, vampires were reinvented, courtesy of productions like *The Hunger*, *The Lost Boys*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and even *John Carpenter's Vampires*. These, and other, films eschewed old traditions like capes and middle-European accents, and in some cases even made fun of such unfashionable affectations. It is strange that *Count Yorga* has the foresight to imagine that a vampire might dwell in contemporary America, but not the smarts to update the vampire's look to go with the modern feel. If a vampire wanted to "blend in" in the late 1960s or early 1970s, shouldn't he wear bell-bottoms and tie-dye shirts? That would have been an innovation.

Though it might accurately be called a bridge between vampire generations, *Count Yorga's* lasting strength, even today, remains its central performance. Robert Quarry is ideal as the vampire: cunning, slick, smart and with a malicious leer that suggests appetites most unhealthy. He is better than the script, which ends with Yorga's demise and, finally, an easily anticipated "sting."

LEGACY: *Count Yorga, Vampire*, was so popular and well-received that a sequel, *Return of Count Yorga* (1971), followed, and Robert Quarry, for a time, became a cult-horror star, leaping franchises and appearing as Vincent Price's nemesis in *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972).

The Crimson Cult

Cast & Crew

CAST: Boris Karloff (Professor Marsh); Christopher Lee (Marley); Barbara Steele (Lavinia); Michael Gough (Elder); Mark Eden (Robert Manning); Virginia Wetherell (Eve).

CREW: *Directed by:* Vernon Sewell. *Screenplay by:* Mervyn Haisman and Henry Lincoln. *Director of Photography:* Johnny Coquillon. *Music:* Peter

Knight. *Produced by:* Louis M. Heyward. American International Pictures. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 87 minutes.

DETAILS: In an English hamlet, a scholar in the ways of witchcraft (Karloff) faces off against a coven of witches that bears a historical grudge. Long believed to be Karloff's final film, *The Crimson Cult* features an all-star horror cast, including Lee, Gough and Steele.

Cry of the Banshee

Cast & Crew

CAST: Vincent Price (Lord Whitman); Hilary Dwyer (Maureen Whitman); Patrick Mower (Roderick); Elisabeth Bergner (Oona); Essy Perrson (Lady Whitman).

CREW: *Directed and Produced by:* Gordon Hessler. *Screenplay by:* Christopher Wicking and Tim Kelly. *Director of Photography:* John Coquillon. *Music:* Les Baxter. *Film Editor:* Oswald Hafenrichter. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approx).

DETAILS: An evil nobleman (Price) goes on a rampage, killing all the witches of the land. One wrathful witch named Oona (Bergner) takes exception to this cause, and summons a banshee to strike back at the lord's family. A cheap "witchhunt" type of movie, though spiced with Price's fine performance and plenty of nudity.

The Dunwich Horror

Cast & Crew

CAST: Sandra Dee (Nancy Walker); Dean Stockwell (Wilbur Whateley); Ed Begley (Dr. Henry Armitage); Sam Jaffe (Grandpa); Lloyd Bachner (Dr. Cory); Donna Baccala (Elizabeth Hamilton).

CREW: *Directed by:* Daniel Haller. *Screenplay by:*

Curtis Lee Hanson, Henry Rosenbaum and Ronald Silkosky. *Based on the Story by:* H. P. Lovecraft. *Director of Photography:* Richard C. Glouner. *Music by:* Les Baxter. *Produced by:* James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff. American International Pictures. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

DETAILS: An early screen adaptation of H. P. Lovecraft's terrifying work. When a sacred book is stolen from Miskatonic University, a doorway is opened for a race of evil creatures imprisoned in another dimension. Sandra Dee plays a college student who gets involved in supernatural happenings, and Sam Jaffe, an old man who warns of horrors to come.

Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed! (1970) * *

Critical Reception

"...Anthony Nelson Keys and Bert Batt, who wrote the original story for this one, have made a couple of minor, though notable, changes in the recent [Hammer Films] formula."—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, April 16, 1970, page 54.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Baron Frankenstein); Simon Ward (Karl); Veronica Carlson (Anna); Thorley Walters (Inspector Frisch); Freddie Jones (Dr. Richter); Maxine Audley (Ella Brandt); Geoffrey Bayldon (Police Doctor); George Pravda (Doctor Brandt); Colette O'Neil (Mad Woman); Peter Copley (Principal); Frank Middlemass, George Belban, Norman Shelley, Michael Goren (Guests); Jim Collier (Dr. Heidecke); Allan Surtees, Windsor Davies (Police).

CREW: Warner Brothers and Seven Arts Present a Hammer Film Production. Produced at Associate

British Studios, Elstree, London, England.
Distributed by Warner Brothers—Seven Arts.
Directed by: Terence Fisher. *Produced by:* Anthony Nelson Keys. *Music Composed by:* James Bernard.
Musical Director: Philip Martell. *Director of Photography:* Arthur Grant. *Supporting Art Director:* Bernard Robinson. *Editor:* Gordon Hales. *Production Manager:* Christopher Neame. *Assistant Director:* Bert Batt. *Camera Operator:* Neil Binney. *Sound Recordist:* Ben Hawkins. *Sound Editor:* Don Hanasinghe. *Continuity:* Dolcen Dearnaley. *Casting Director:* Irene Lamb. *Make-up:* Eddie Knight. *Hairstylist:* Nat McDermott. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Rosemary Burrows. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Coffie Slattery. *Construction Manager:* Arthur Hanley. *Screenplay by:* Bert Batt. *From an original story idea by:* Anthony Nelson Keys and Bert Batt. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 103 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Freddie Jones plays a man who has his brain transplanted to a new body by Frankenstein. He visits his wife, who fails to recognize him, and she rejects him. I love that subject! I thought about that film more than any of the others, because of that one element”².—Director Terence Fisher reflects on *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* (1970).



Lucky Peter Cushing gets a grip on buxom Veronica Carlson in a publicity still from *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* (1970).

SYNOPSIS: Forced from his homeland and living in hiding in England, the Baron Frankenstein is up to his old ghoulish tricks. He murders a prominent city doctor to possess his head, and the city police investigate the crime, aware they are looking for a

dangerous, mad, medical “adventurer.” Frankenstein moves into the boarding house of a beautiful girl named Anna. When the Baron learns that Anna and her boyfriend, Dr. Karl Holst of the local insane asylum, are involved in illegal narcotics, he blackmails them into becoming his assistants. Karl helps Frankenstein steal equipment one night and kills a night watchman, getting himself in even deeper with the mad Frankenstein.

The Baron has come to England with a purpose. His compatriot, Dr. Brandt, possessed the knowledge to keep disembodied brains alive for transplant surgery, and Frankenstein needs that information. Unfortunately, Brandt went insane after his dealings with Frankenstein and is now residing in the asylum where Karl works. Frankenstein and Karl break Brandt out of his imprisonment, but he is injured in the process. Frankenstein transplants Brandt’s valuable brain into the body of another man, Professor Richter. Meanwhile, the police tighten their search and Brandt’s wife, Ella, recognizes Frankenstein on the street. She pursues him to the boarding house and Frankenstein shows her how he has saved her husband’s life by transplanting his living brain into the body of Richter. He swears Ella to secrecy, but when she leaves, flees with his patient and Anna and Karl back to his homeland. Ella informs the police.

At Frankenstein’s castle, Karl and Anna plot to escape from the madman. Brandt awakens in his new body and realizes what has become of him. Frightened by Brandt, Anna attempts to kill him. Frankenstein kills Anna for her transgression, leaving an angry Karl. Meanwhile, Brandt returns to London, Frankenstein in hot pursuit, and has a tender last meeting with his wife Ella. Then, he decides that all his work pertaining to successful brain transplants must be destroyed. Plotting revenge against Frankenstein, Brandt taunts him with the formula he so desperately desires. But Brandt burns down his own house and carries Frankenstein to a fiery death while Karl watches.

COMMENTARY: The horror films produced by Hammer Studios are beloved by fans around the globe for so many good reasons. When they re-invented and re-introduced the *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* myths in the late 1950s and 1960s, Hammer Studios updated the horror ethos with gore galore (i.e. running blood), garish color

(running red blood), and a whole lot of female pulchritude. Fine production values were in evidence, and the films were invariably fronted by Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, and, praise Heaven, Ingrid Pitt. The stories were familiar for the most part, but solidly scripted and competently directed. Most importantly, the Hammer horrors treated their subject matter with straight-faced respect, not camp humor or jokey irreverence. The thoughtful approach alone was enough to win the films legions of admirers.

But by the 1970s, the light behind Hammer's films was starting to fade. Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, the gore, the women and the production values were still in the limelight, as was the straight-faced, honest approach to storytelling, but the films no longer felt new or innovative, not after a dozen years (and a dozen films) repeating the same formula. Christopher Lee was bored out of his mind towards the end, the scripts became re-hashes, wit was absent, and the Hammer *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* series suffered the fate of all franchises. Quality declined and so did audience affection. This is not an attack on Hammer, it is merely a fact. All franchises decline at some point, as witnessed by the fall of *Star Trek* today, or the fading of the James Bond film series in the late '80s before Pierce Brosnan took over. The fact that Hammer's films grew worse in the '70s in no way subtracts from the fact that in the late '50s and all throughout the 1960s Hammer was a pioneer and a producer of fine, memorable pictures. But much of its output in the seventies was plainly inferior to what had come before. In a way, this acknowledgment is another backhanded compliment because, among others, Hammer was clearly competing with itself and its own history of excellence at this point.

Which brings the discussion to *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!*, the luridly-titled Frankenstein opus of 1970. It is sad and discomfoting to see a pioneer become old hat, but that is exactly what happens here in a subdued, slow-paced film that never reaches the intensity promised by its title. The film opens with melodrama. Two schemers, Karl and Anna, are caught in an illegal narcotic ring by the Baron Frankenstein and consequently forced to serve as his assistants while he attempts to preserve the mind of an insane associate named Brandt. The elaborate plot winds on through drug trafficking, blackmail, murder, prison breakouts and precious little

horror or suspense until the absurd true plot is laid bare. Get this: Brandt has learned the secret of successful brain transplants, but he's crazy. So Frankenstein breaks him out of an asylum and cures his insanity so as to get the secret formula of brain transplants. But, Brandt is wounded in the asylum breakout and Frankenstein must transplant his healthy brain into a new body to save him.

Okay, that plot is either absurd or inspired, depending on one's point of view. At the very least, it is workable, though only Frankenstein could see curing insanity as just one more little hurdle to jump. However, at the end of the movie, this plot is revealed to be completely ridiculous when Brandt returns to his home and burns all of his research about brain transplants. Now wait a minute! If Brandt recorded the all-important secret formula for successful brain transplant surgery in his notes, why didn't Frankenstein simply go to the Brandt home and take the notes, thereby getting the secret he needed? If Brandt's wife had refused Frankenstein access, he could have broken in and stolen the notes. Instead, Frankenstein adheres to his crazy plan: breaking Brandt out of the asylum, transplanting his brain, curing his insanity, and getting the formula straight from the horse's mouth. Personally, this author would have tried for the notes first.

It isn't often that a film renders its own plot idiotic, but *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!*'s unbelievable final act does just that. Actually, *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!*'s script is shoddy in a number of areas. All through the picture, it cuts back to London police officers as they valiantly attempt to track down Frankenstein and stop his reign of terror. There are at least four scenes of the inspector, the doctor and other officers following the case of what they presume to be a murdering doctor. Yet, amazingly, there is no closure to these sequences, and they ultimately contribute nothing to the film. The police do not solve the case, and do not catch Frankenstein either. They do not even get in a token appearance at the end of the picture. With no punctuation, no closure whatsoever to these scenes, the cop subplot is revealed to be a time-waster; padding that adds nothing to the film on any thematic level.

But *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!*'s worst transgression is neither its absurd plot nor its dead-end script structure. Worst of all, the

screenplay fails to really understand the character of Brandt, the surrogate Frankenstein monster in this case. Again, it is helpful to review the situation. Brandt is wasting away in an asylum, driven irrevocably insane as the picture starts. His doctor believes this melancholy is incurable, so Brandt is a man with no future. In the course of the story, Frankenstein restores Brandt's sanity and puts his brain in a healthy body when his old one is mortally wounded. There is just one side effect: a long scar on Brandt's forehead. But is Brandt grateful to have his mind back after being nuts, alone, and consigned forever after to an insane asylum? Is he glad to be alive and whole and sentient? Of course not, because the great law of movie clichés tells us that Brandt is an abomination against God! Instead of thanking Frankenstein for saving him, Brandt wants revenge against the good doctor. Why should the character possibly feel this way? Without Frankenstein's intervention he was doomed, forsaken, and crazed!

If this is indeed a moral, ethical and religious issue that Frankenstein tampered in "God's domain," then there still should have been a moment in the screenplay when Brandt weighed these factors against his own newfound health. Instead, *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* relies on clichés, flies on autopilot and assumes that Brandt would simply want vengeance for his new shape. Bizarrely, the script makes the same assumption about Brandt's wife, Ella. If your spouse was condemned to insanity wouldn't you rejoice to have him or her back, even in a new, slightly scarred body? If one thinks about it, Frankenstein accomplishes two miracles in this movie (successful brain transplant surgery, and the curing of insanity) but all anybody can do about it is complain!

Despite the numerous script flaws, Peter Cushing, the busiest man in horror in the 1970s, remains a marvel as Frankenstein. Though the character is doomed to be static, never learning from mistakes, always creating death rather than life, Cushing nonetheless imbues the character with a most compelling brand of obsession. Whether arguing for scientific advances ("without pushing the boundaries of knowledge, we'd still be living in caves!!!" he snaps), or barking orders at his unwilling underlings, Cushing paints a fine portrait of genius-tinged madness. A tribute to his skill is that the most fascinating moment of *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* comes when

Cushing's doctor catches a glimpse of the beautiful Anna undressing in her bedroom. A lustful Frankenstein breaks in, and viciously has his way with her, proving he is not all intellect and science after all. If there is anything surprising in the least about this film, Cushing's moment of physical release would certainly qualify. Frankenstein, usually so focused on other matters, succumbs to the desires of the flesh in a flurry of violence ... if only for a moment. Cushing seems to understand here, and throughout the film, what makes this madman tick, right down to his carnal appetites.

Hammer films are much, much more than buxom women in diaphanous nightgowns and torrents of running red blood, but *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* reveals a franchise in serious decline. It looks good and it is well acted, but the script is awful, filled with plot dead-ends and implausibilities that undermine the narrative. An old saying goes: "if it isn't on the page, it won't be on the stage." That truism could have been the motto of *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* It has all the icing of Hammer's best desserts, but the cake underneath is stale.

Horror of Frankenstein

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ralph Bates (Victor Frankenstein); Graham James (Wilhem); Kate O'Mara (Alice); Veronica Carlson (Elizabeth); Dennis Price (Grave Robber); David Prowse (the Monster).

CREW: *Produced and Directed by:* Jimmy Sangster.
Written by: Jeremy Sangster and Jeremy Burnham.
A Hammer Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 94 minutes.

DETAILS: Yet another entry in Hammer's long standing Frankenstein film franchise, though this one lacks the star presence of Peter Cushing. Ralph Bates is the new Frankenstein, but he's trapped in a familiar story involving murder, a monster, body parts and the doctor's laboratory.

House of Dark Shadows (1970) * *

Critical Reception

“...has no subject except its special effects (which aren’t very good) and its ... shock sequences. Characters are picked up and dropped with indifference.... And by the end of the movie everybody is either dead or discarded or a vampire.... It is neither fun nor even especially clean.”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, October 29, 1970, page 58.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jonathan Frid (Barnabas Collins); Grayson Hall (Dr. Julia Hoffman); Kathryn Leigh Scott (Maggie Evans); Roger Davis (Jeff Clark); Nancy Barrett (Carolyn Stoddard); John Karlen (Willie Loomis); Thayer David (Professor T. Eliot Stokes); Louis Edmonds (Roger Collins); Donal Biscoe (Todd Jennings); David Henesy (David Collins); Dennis Patrick (Sheriff George Patterson); Joan Bennett (Elizabeth Collins Stoddard); Lisa Richards (Daphne Budd); Jerry Lacy (Minister); Barbara Cason (Mrs. Johnson); Paul Michael (Old Man); Humbert Astredo (Dr. Forbes); Terry Crawford (Todd’s Nurse); Michael Stroka (Pallbearer).

CREW: Metro Goldwyn Mayer Presents A Dan Curtis Production, *House of Dark Shadows*. *Film Editor:* Arline Garson. *Camera Operator:* Dick Mingalone. *Sound:* Chris Newman, Jack C. Jacobsen. *Sound Mixer:* Bob Fine. *Titles:* F. Hillsberg Inc. *Special Make-up:* Dick Smith. *Wardrobe Designer:* Ramse Mostoller. *Make-up:* Robert Layden. *Hairdresser:* Verne Caruso. *Set Decoration:* Ken Fitzpatrick. *Casting:* Linda Otto. *Stunt Choreographer:* Alex Stevens. *Filmed in:* Metrocolor. *Production Supervisor:* Hal Schaffel. *Assistant*

Director: William Gerrity, Jr. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Robert Cobert. *Director of Photography:* Arthur Ornitz. *Production Designer/ Associate Producer:* Trevor Williams. *Screenplay:* Sam Hall and Gordon Russell. Based upon the ABC-TV Series. *Produced and Directed by:* Dan Curtis. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 90 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Youngsters today are looking for a new morality. And so is Barnabas... He hates what he is and he’s in terrible agony. Just like the kids today, he’s confused, lost, screwed up and searching for something”³.—Jonathan Frid ruminates on the popularity of his vampiric alter ego.

SYNOPSIS: Looking for young David Collins, the youngest child of a wealthy New England family, governess Maggie Evans stumbles across drunk Willie Loomis on the family grounds at nightfall. He is searching for the legendary Collins jewels in the estate graveyard, but he uncovers something infinitely more frightening. In the Collins crypt, Loomis opens a sealed casket and frees an ancient evil, the regal vampire Barnabas Collins. Before long, this vampire has sucked dry his first victim, Daphne, leaving two puncture marks on her neck. Meanwhile, Maggie becomes locked in the old Collins estate until her boyfriend Jeff finds her, along with the naughty, mischievous David.

A few nights later, and after more deadly vampire attacks, Barnabas introduces himself to the polite society of Collinsport, passing himself off as a Collins cousin from England. Barnabas immediately charms the relatives and is welcomed to live in the old Collinswood house. Ironically, this is the home he lived in a hundred and eighty years ago, and it has hardly changed in the intervening decades. On the eve of a masquerade ball, Barnabas seduces and bites Carolyn Collins, making her his undead slave. At the party, Barnabas also finds himself interested in Maggie Evans because she is a dead ringer for the love of his life, Josette DuPres. Almost two hundred years ago, Josette jumped to her death from Widow’s Hill when she

learned that her beloved was an undead monster. Feeling that Josette has returned to him, Barnabas sets out to woo Maggie. A jealous Carolyn attempts to stop these romantic attempts, but Barnabas bites her again, killing her this time.

At the same time, a doctor named Julia Hoffman, who is writing the Collins family history, analyzes some of the blood on Carolyn's corpse and determines that the creature who attacked her suffers from a rare form of a disease—vampirism—that could be curable through advanced medical science.

That night, a living dead Carolyn Collins rises from her grave and attacks young David in the dried-up Collinswood pool house. He escapes and warns his family that Carolyn lives, but the family does not believe his wild story. Carolyn's lover, Todd, is attacked by Carolyn that very night, but an angry Barnabas warns her not to act without his direct authority. Carolyn ignores this warning and makes Todd a full vampire. The police arrive, armed with crucifixes, and put an end to Carolyn's defiance.

Now that Dr. Hoffman knows that Barnabas is a vampire, she offers him a cure. Barnabas eagerly accepts the chance to escape his disease, and soon after the therapy begins, shows signs of improvement, even being able to walk in the sun. However, Hoffman has secretly fallen in love with Barnabas and is jealous of the affection he showers on Maggie. Hoffman purposefully botches the cure and Barnabas ages hundreds of years in a matter of seconds. An angry Barnabas kills Julia for her betrayal and feeds on Maggie to restore his youth. The Collinsport police and Collins family rally their forces to protect Maggie from the vampire, but Barnabas returns to her, seeking his bride, and takes her to the old house.

Finally, it is up to Maggie's boyfriend David to defeat Barnabas in the old house before a deadly wedding can occur.

COMMENTARY: Adapting a popular TV series into a successful feature film is rarely an easy task. The *Star Trek* franchise has attempted this balancing act nine times (as of this writing) and had, arguably, only two or three successes in translating its video material into original, but faithful, screen gold. Forget about *The*

Wild Wild West (1999), *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000) or *Lost in Space* (1998): they did not even attempt to honor their TV material, instead relying only on a well-known franchise name, and big star appeal. But long before any of these TV-to-film ventures came about, *Dark Shadows* producer Dan Curtis was confronting the same problems. How could he translate the success of an afternoon daily soap opera (which aired more than 1,000 episodes!) into a box office success that nonetheless remained true to the ethos of what he and Art Wallace had created for the tube?

What Curtis did, which is evident in *House of Dark Shadows*, was to improve the overall production values, retain the original cast, and telescope a long and familiar story into a short, familiar one. The first two decisions work to the film's advantage to some degree; the third does not. Because the cast is so large, it is ill served in a feature of this length (barely 90 minutes), with only Frid making any impact. And the story, now stripped of the soap's tangential (and often inspired) flourishes, looks more imitative of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* than ever before.

First impressions from *House of Dark Shadows* are rather positive. The film looks good, getting a leg-up on its on-the-cheap TV brother by featuring real exteriors (rather than soundstages), and genuinely impressive sets, as well as more explicit bloodletting. The menacing Frid, a powerful screen presence as the vampire Barnabas, is rightly held back for a time (with the audience catching glimpses only of his ringed fingers and trademark cane), thus building anticipation and making for a grand entrance. And, fostering a sense of nostalgic enjoyment, Curtis's direction employs then-timely camera moves and techniques to flashily serve the story.

But, *House of Dark Shadows* has a weak script in an important regard: there are no introductions to any of the Collins family other than Barnabas, meaning that those who do not follow the show are left rudderless. Who are these people? What are their relationships to one another? *House of Dark Shadows* assumes that the audience already knows all of that material, rightly or wrongly, and the characters (on the movie screen) never translate as individuals. This problem is enhanced by the fact that few of the Collins get separate screen time, let alone meaningful dialogue, unless they are featured

in a death sequence ... not the best venue in which to get to know someone.

Lacking the extraordinary individuality of the TV characters, as well as the subplots that made their machinations interesting, *House of Dark Shadows* emerges as something that the TV series never was, a bland derivation of Bram Stoker's novel. To wit, Willie Loomis now seems like Renfield, less the opportunist of the TV series and more the vampire stoolie of cliché. The old Collins house where Barnabas takes up residence also smacks of Carfax Abbey without the rich detail of the long-lived soap. Elliott is a dull Van Helsing substitute, and so forth. It is a shame to witness this homogenization of *Dark Shadows* because the TV series really saw things through a skewed, and wonderfully energetic, perspective.

Frid's Barnabas (on TV) was a Byronic vampire worthy of sympathy, an anti-hero who hated what he was, and even became a kind of generational spokesman for disaffected youth of the late '60s and early '70s. Though in the film, Barnabas is still tortured (decrying "how could anyone live like this?"), he is more like the traditional vampire of yore, garbed in cape and fangs, seducing the innocent and drinking their blood. The portions of the film that work best are those that involve Barnabas's belief that he can be cured, and thus redeemed. But those moments, unlike the TV series, are brief.

House of Dark Shadows also depends on what this author often calls "selective stupidity" in its plotting. A clever viewer will ask some pertinent questions. Like, who is the one new person in town, whose very arrival coincides with a rash of vampiric attacks and death? Gee, could it be the caped fellow who just happens to be a dead ringer for a Collins who "mysteriously vanished" 180 years ago? Over the weeks and months on the TV series, issues like this were flattened out through time, barely having impact, but in a sparse 90 minutes, the story of Barnabas is exposed as rather weak. And, sadly, the audience is once again back in that predictable world where vampire bites on the neck are dismissed as animal bites, a factor also in *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and *Blacula* (1972). It is a shame, but *House of Dark Shadows* is a horror film with dumb characters. As it stands, half the Collins family is

exterminated by the time anyone realizes something sinister is really happening.

The best way to describe the difference between *Dark Shadows* on TV and *Dark Shadows* as film is that the former is soap opera first and horror second, while the latter is the reverse. What made the low-budget series unique, charming, and long-lived was its concentration on characters and relationships. The film lops out all of that good stuff, all of that interpersonal intrigue, and is left with a hollow shell, the bare bones of its familiar vampire story. No, the movie is not terrible, and Frid is still a great vampire, but in the end, *House of Dark Shadows* is another TV-to-film failure, a movie that fails to understand why *Dark Shadows* was so popular in the first place.

LEGACY: A sequel (sans Jonathan Frid, and the Barnabas connection), was released in 1971, entitled *Night of Long Dark Shadows*. Poorly received, the film landed *Dark Shadows* in cult obscurity until 1991, when Dan Curtis revived the franchise in a short-lived NBC TV series, featuring Ben Cross as Barnabas Collins. Since then, there has been talk of a *Dark Shadows* movie, and a *Dark Shadows* Broadway production. The show remains a staple on The Sci-Fi Channel.

Lust for a Vampire (1970) * * *

Critical Reception

“...it offers an increasingly complicated plot combined with elements of jokiness which together render *Lust for a Vampire* more an example of early 1970s camp, a curious hybrid of romance, comedy and thriller, than a horror film.”—Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*, Manchester University Press, 1993, page 165.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ralph Bates (Giles Barton); Barbara Jefford (Countess Herritzen); Suzanna Leigh (Janet

Playfair); Michael Johnson (Richard Lestrangle); Yutte Stensgaard (Mircalla); Helen Christie (Miss Simpson); Pippa Steel (Susan Pelley); David Healy (Raymond Pelley); Harvey Hall (Inspector Heinrich); Mike Raven (Count Karnstein); Michael Brennan (Landlord); Jack Melford (Bishop); Judy Matheson (Amanda); Christopher Neame (Hans); Erik Chitty (Professor Herz); Caryl Little (Isabel); Jonathan Cecil (Biggs); Kirsten Lindholm (Peasant Girl); Luan Peters (Trudi); Nick Brimble (First Villager); David Richardson (Second Villager); Vivienne Chandler, Erica Beale, Melinda Church, Melita Clarke, Jackie Chapman, Sue Longhurt, Patricia Warner (School Girls).

CREW: A Hammer Production. *Director of Photography:* David Muir. *Art Director:* Don Mingaye. *Editor:* Spencer Reeve. *Music composed by:* Harry Robinson. *“Strange Love” sung by:* Tracy, *Lyrics by:* Frank Godwin. *Musical Supervisor:* Philip Martell. *Production Manager:* Tom Sachs. *Assistant Director:* David Bracknell. *Sound Recordist:* Ron Barron. *Sound Editor:* Terry Poulton. *Camera:* R. Anstiss. *Continuity:* Betty Harley. *Make-up Supervisor:* George Blackler. *Hairdressing Supervisor:* Laura Nightingale. *Construction Manager:* Bill Greene. *Recording Director:* Tony Lumkin. *Dubbing Mixer:* Len Abbott. *Choreographer:* Babbie McManus. *Screenplay:* Tudor Gates. *Based on characters created by:* J. Sheridan Le Fanu. *Produced by:* Harry Fine, Michael Style. *Directed by:* Jimmy Sangster. A Hammer Film Production made at EMI/MGM Elstree Studios, England. Distributed by Anglo-EMI Film Distributors Ltd. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 92 minutes.



Yutte Stensgaard portrays the vampire Mircalla/Carmilla, embodying *Lust for a Vampire* (1970).

SYNOPSIS: In 1830, a peasant girl is abducted in a carriage belonging to Count Karnstein, and transported to the family castle.

There, she is killed in a sacrificial homage to Satan and her virginal blood resurrects the beautiful vampire Carmilla (also known as Mircalla).

In the nearby village, playboy and writer Richard Lestrangle takes up residence and is warned about the Karnstein family of vampires. Ignoring the danger, Lestrangle visits Karnstein castle and meets a bevy of local schoolgirls who are also visiting the decaying mansion on a field trip. Lestrangle returns to the school with the girls and meets the beautiful new student who has just enrolled—actually the vampire Mircalla. At the same time, Lestrangle befriends the odd science teacher, Giles Barton.

Before long, Mircalla Karnstein is up to her old vampire ways. She drains the blood of a barmaid at the inn, and then sucks dry a beautiful schoolgirl, Susan Pelley. The pupil is consequently dumped in a well by a secret accomplice. As Mircalla works her way through the tasty schoolgirls, Lestrangle finds himself hopelessly in love with her. This does not please Janet Playfair, a fellow teacher who has developed an affection for Richard. Richard also shares his obsession for Mircalla with Giles Barton. One night, Barton arranges to meet secretly with Mircalla at the Karnstein Castle. He tells her that he knows who she is, and that he wants to worship both her and the Devil. Mircalla rejects his offer and kills him. The following morning, Barton's pale, drained body is found on the school grounds.

While investigating the deaths of Susan and Barton, Richard realizes Mircalla's true identity and arranges to meet Mircalla at the castle that night, repeating Barton's mistake. Mircalla reveals that she is a Karnstein, but claims to have changed her name. She also denies being a vampire. Richard demands that she make love to him as proof of her innocence. She acquiesces.

The police and Susan Pelley's father investigate Susan's disappearance and Barton's death. Susan's body is discovered in the well (where Barton hid it to protect Mircalla), but the police inspector comes to an unpleasant end when Count Karstein hurls him down the well too. Meanwhile, Janet Playfair protects herself from the hunger of Mircalla with a crucifix. Susan's father and a pathologist discover vampire bites on Susan's corpse and confer

with a visiting Catholic priest about it. Their forces marshaled, the priest, the villagers and Mr. Pelley storm the castle. They kill the Karnsteins, and burn down the castle. Mircalla is killed when a flaming two-by-four falls from the castle roof and stakes her through the heart. Richard is then released from his lust for a vampire.

COMMENTARY: You have to love Hammer. There is very little doubt why this vampire movie (the second in the Karnstein cycle after *The Vampire Lovers*) exists at all. *Breasts*. It's all about breasts. Every element of this picture, from setting to plot incident, is designed solely to reveal breasts in all their glory. Big breasts, little breasts, breasts under nightgowns, exposed breasts in water, heaving breasts, etc. But movies have been made with less noble intentions and *Lust for a Vampire* displays its up-front charms with enough good humor and blood-letting to give one the illusion that the baser human instincts are not being pandered to. But, of course, they are.

Considering the new freedom of 1970s cinema and the loosening of the moral code, perhaps it was only a matter of time before Hammer Studios set a horror film at an all-girl's school. This setting permits for many lascivious moments, all wonderfully lit and filmed. In one notable scene, a bevy of adolescent girls frolic and dance on the school grounds in skimpy dresses that have slits cut all the way up the legs. In another scene, set in a dormitory room, a beautiful student (the luscious Pippa Steel...) thoughtfully massages Mircalla's (the even more luscious Yutte Stensgaard's...) shoulders, and her blouse "inadvertently" (right!) drops to reveal her ample breasts. Then, because there is a God, the same student (Steel) obligingly suggests a midnight visit to the nearby lake ... and a skinny dip.

At this point in the film, this reviewer's wife was starting to grow suspicious. As the camera lingered on the two beautiful girls in the water ... mostly topless, she pointed out that it still appeared to be daylight. "Midnight is really bright in England, isn't it?" she noted with a hint of irritation. *All the better to see those breasts by, my dear.*

Before long, there have been eight shots of beautiful breasts and three flashbacks of scenes already shown (quite smart, actually, in

case attention was diverted from the plot by the visual charms of the female cast). Then, there is the immortal love scene in which Mircalla (the iron-willed queen of evil) is seduced against her will by a randy teacher. Stensgaard's eyes go cross, and then roll back in her head as she makes love: a funny visual cue to her attainment of orgasm. All this happens, humorously, to a wretched pop song entitled "Strange Love." Throughout this sequence and the film itself Stensgaard is unfailingly beautiful and sensual, though perhaps lacking in the gravitas of her predecessor in the role, Ingrid Pitt.

Predictably, all the elements of *Lust for a Vampire* not involving nudity seem rushed and poorly conceived. Mircalla dies when—*get this*—a flaming two-by-four from her castle ceiling conveniently stakes her through the heart! Talk about good aim (and bad luck)! And, of course, there is also a sexist double standard at work here. Mircalla clearly enjoys going both ways (seducing men and women), but the audience never sees Christopher Lee, as Dracula, seducing a man, does it? Even more to the point, Mircalla gets seduced herself by that randy professor, not vice versa. Again, Dracula was never so weak as to be the victim of his own prey, was he? Poor Mircalla ... she's got a long way to go, baby.

All in all, *Lust for a Vampire* is a brilliant male fantasy. A man goes to work at an all-girl school and gets to make it with a really hot lesbian vampire. The period detail, the stately acting, the presence of evil ... that's all afterglow here. Stensgaard, Steele, and Leigh (as another teacher) are unfailingly gorgeous (and ample), and they make *Lust for a Vampire* eminently watchable and thoroughly enjoyable.

Next!

Cast & Crew

CAST: Alberto De Mondoza (Neil Ward); Edwise Fenech (Julie Ward); Cristina Airolti (Carol); George Hilton (George); Ivan Rassimov (Jean).

CREW: *Directed by:* Luciano Martino. *Screenplay by:*

Ernesto Gastaldi *with the collaboration of*: Vittorio Caronia. *Original story*: Eduardo M. Brochero. *Director of Photography*: Emilio Foriscat. *Music*: Nora Orlandi. *Produced by*: Sergio Martino and Antonio Crescenzi. *Released by*: Marion Films Limited and Gemini Releasing. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 81 minutes.

DETAILS: *The New York Times* called this slasher picture “splattery and sloppy” in its August 7, 1970, review of the film. Various sources list it as being of Italian, Spanish or German origination. The ad line was “Heaven Help Whoever is ... *Next!*” The film involves a series of murders in Vienna that are being conducted by a sex-crazed lunatic who strikes with a razor. Released on American video as *Blade of the Ripper*.

Scars of Dracula (1970) * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Dracula); Dennis Waterman (Simon); Jenny Hanley (Sarah); Christopher Matthews (Paul); Patrick Troughton (Klove); Michael Gwynn (Priest); Michael Ripper (Landlord); Wendy Hamilton (Julie); Anouska Hempel (Tania); Delia Lindsay (Alice); Bob Todd (Burgomaster); Toke Townley (Elderly Wagoner); David Leland (First Officer); Richard Durden (Second Officer); Morris Bush (Farmer); Margo Boht (Landlord's Wife); Clive Barker (Fat Young Man).

CREW: EMI Films Productions Ltd. Present a Hammer Production, *Scars of Dracula*. *Director of Photography*: Moray Grant. *Art Director*: Scott MacGregor. *Editor*: James Needs. *Music Composed by*: James Bernard. *Musical Supervisor*: Philip Martell. *Production Manager*: Tom Sacks. *Assistant Director*: Derek Whitehurst. *Sound Recordist*: Ron Barron. *Sound Editor*: Roy Hyde. *Continuity*: Betty

Harley. *Make-up Supervisor*: Wally Schneiderman.
Special Effects: Roger Dicken. *Dubbing Mixer*: Dennis Whitlock. *Recording Supervisor*: Tony Lumkin.
Screenplay by: John Elder. *Based on a character created by*: Bram Stoker. *Produced by*: Aida Young.
Color by: Technicolor. *Directed by*: Roy Ward Baker.
A Hammer Production made at EMI/MGM Elstree Studios England. Distributed by Anglo-EMI Film Distribution Ltd. and released through MGM-EMI Film Distribution Ltd. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: The blood of a bat spills on the ashes of Count Dracula and he is resurrected. Before long, he is up to his old vampiric tricks, draining the blood of beautiful local women. A mob, led by a barkeep and a priest, stages an attack on his castle and starts a fire. Dracula survives the attack and goes on the counter-offensive, sending an army of vampire bats to murder all the townswomen as they pray in church.

Elsewhere, a gallant fellow named Paul is chased by the police for his deflowering of the daughter of a local official. He survives a trip on a runaway carriage and ends up in Dracula's woods. After being denied access to the inn, he travels to the still-standing castle. He is welcomed by Dracula, and compelled to stay the night. Paul soon realizes he is a prisoner in the mansion and attempts to escape by climbing out a window. He ends up in Dracula's bedroom ... with the sleeping vampire only feet away.

Meanwhile, the police search for Paul and are told he went to the castle. Paul's brother, Simon, and his beautiful betrothed, Sarah, try to find Paul by retracing his steps. They too meet Dracula at his castle. Simon questions Dracula's hulking manservant, Klove, about Paul, and the odd fellow warns Simon to take Sarah away before Dracula has his way with her. Simon and Sarah escape from the castle as night falls.

In the village, the townspeople refuse to help Simon and Sarah, except for the town priest. He takes them to the church, the site of the massacre, and shares the history of Dracula with them while they wait for dawn. When dawn comes, Simon returns to the castle

to find Paul, only to learn that the count has murdered his brother. Dracula mesmerizes Simon, and the young hero is unable to stake the vampire. Back in the village, a bat pecks the town priest to death and Sarah is compelled to return to the castle. Simon breaks free of Dracula's power and fights him off with a crucifix as Sarah finds herself in imminent danger. Simon delivers the vampire a final death blow by spearing him with a metal rod. Lightning then reaches down from heaven and electrocutes the vampire.

COMMENTARY: Hammer Studios is back to its old bag of tricks in the lackluster *Scars of Dracula*, a by-the-numbers sequel that amply demonstrates why the studio's audience was shrinking as the 1960s became the 1970s. The film commences with the inevitable fake bat flapping about on wires. Unlike most bats, this fella proves extremely accommodating: it flies into Dracula's castle on a specific trajectory, obligingly spits blood on the vampire's ashes (thus resurrecting him...), and then flaps out on its preordained wire path. In film history, has there ever been a more uninspiring or silly monster resurrection? Well, in fairness, probably so, since a dog's urine (?) brought life back to Freddy Krueger's discarded bones in *A Nightmare on Elm Street IV: The Dream Master* (1989). Still, this ludicrous *deus ex machina* resurrection ranks high (or is it low?), lacking the pomp and dignity that Count Dracula should surely embody.

From that inauspicious start, *Scars of Dracula*, as if on automatic pilot, re-hashes in rote fashion all the popular plot elements of previous *Dracula* films. The audience sees the fearful, superstitious villagers, there is the imprisonment of a stranger in the Count's foreboding castle, there appears a lovely maiden who Dracula takes a liking to, et cetera. In toto, these vampire movie clichés are so old they are brittle. Watching the great Christopher Lee go through the same set of hackneyed paces for the umpteenth time, one is left to wonder some deep questions about the meaning of life. Is Dracula happy to be "alive" yet again, living the same old existence in his lonely castle? The isolation, the dependence on blood, the interference of strangers in his personal affairs—these must seem awfully tiring things for the old count to deal with. If the movie actually dealt with the questions of Dracula's unusual existence (seemingly a bunch of painful deaths separated by intervals of

equally painful undead life), it might have actually been interesting. Instead, it is all leftovers from Bram Stoker and previous Drac films.

Making matters even more dire, *Scars of Dracula* puts up no worthy opponent in Dracula's path. Peter Cushing is (wisely) nowhere to be found. The only question this time around is how will the count be offed? In that respect, the film does not disappoint, flashily employing electricity as the mode of the vampire's inevitable (but temporary) destruction.

The films of Hammer Studios are pretty well impervious to criticism since so many people love them so deeply (and in some cases, so blindly). But, it is important to remember that not all Hammer films are created equal. *Scars of Dracula*, like a *Phantom Menace* (1999) or a *Final Frontier* (1989), is a retread of past glories rather than an innovative chapter in a well-established franchise. It is no wonder that after *Scars of Dracula*, Hammer went fishing about madly for new concepts to enliven their moribund vampire series. *Dracula A.D. 1972* brought the count into the twentieth century, *Rites of Dracula* saw him involved in an *Avengers*-like caper to unleash bubonic plague upon an unsuspecting world, and *The Legend of 7 Golden Vampires* depicted Dracula in the form of an ass-kicking, Chinese martial artist/warlord. Any of those unusual (and rather wacky) developments would have been welcome in *Scars of Dracula*, which suffers a terminal case of tired blood.

***Scream and Scream Again* (1970) * ***

Critical Reception

“*Scream and Scream Again* proceeds to unwind British-style, crisply, puzzlingly and with some restraint ... into a good, tight knot, after the director, Gordon Hessler, bears down hard and graphically on a countryside pursuit.... But ... the picture slouches into standard fare and ends up in still another mad scientist's lair....”—Howard Thompson, *New York Times*, July 9, 1970, page 44.

Cast and Credits

CAST: Vincent Price (Dr. Browning); Christopher Lee (Fremont); Peter Cushing (Major Benedek); Alfred Marks (Detective Superintendent Bellaver); Christopher Matthews (David Sorel); Judy Huxtable (Sylvia); Anthony Newland (Ludwig); Kenneth Benda (Professor Kingsmill); Marshall Jones (Konratz); Rita Lerka (Jane); David Lodge (Detective Inspector Strickland); Peter Sallis (Schweitz); The Amen Corner (Themselves); Michael Gothard (Keith); With: Yutte Stensgaard, Julian Holloway, Judi Bloom, Clifford Earl, Nigel Lambert.

CREW: American International Pictures Presents *Scream and Scream Again*. *Lighting Cameraman:* John Coquillon. *Editor:* Peter Elliott. *Production Manager:* Teresa Bolland. *Art Director:* Don Mingaye. *Make-up:* Jimmie Evans. *Hairdresser:* Betty Sherriff. *Wardrobe:* Evelyn Gibbs. *Dubbing Editor:* Michael Readborn. *Dubbing Mixer:* Hugh Strain. *Sound Mixer:* Bert Ross. *Screenplay:* Christopher Wicking. *From the Press Editorial Services novel The Disoriented Man by:* Peter Saxon. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg, Milton Subotsky. *Executive Producer:* Louis M. Heyward. *Directed by:* Gordon Hessler. *Screenplay by:* Christopher Wicking. *Music:* Dave Whittaker (*video release*—Kendall Schmidt). *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 94 minutes.

P.O.V.

“It was interesting to have them all in the same film, but they should have had the contretemps between them, utilizing all three in one scene in a face-to-face showdown. But there was no way of working it in: We just brought them in to take advantage of the names, for marquee value”⁴.—*Scream and Scream Again*’s executive producer, Louis M. Heyward, comments on the horror trifecta of Price, Cushing and Lee.

SYNOPSIS: In London, a man collapses while jogging in the park and is promptly taken to a medical ward for attention. When he awakens there, he finds, to his horror, that a leg has been amputated...

Meanwhile, there have been a series of deaths in London. Recently, a woman, Eileen, was found dead in a park, her throat cut, her body drained of blood. The police, led by Detective Bellaver, question her employer, the mysterious Dr. Browning, but he claims to know nothing of the so-called "Vampire Murders." Not far away, the beleaguered jogger awakens from a deep sleep to find he is missing his other leg...

In another part of the world, a strangely powerful man named Konratz moves up the chain of command in his dictatorship-like government by murdering his superior officers. He has a dark secret, one related to the murders in England, but Major Benedek is killed before he can stop Konratz.

Back in London, Bellaver, teaming up with a young coroner, sets up a sting operation for the vampire killer. Aware that the killer stalks his prey at nightclubs, the police set up a female officer as bait. She is nearly murdered by the killer, a superstrong man, but he escapes. They pursue him to a quarry, and he flees on foot up the side of a treacherous mountain. Even after falling down the hill and being cuffed to the car, the vampire-like killer escapes. This time, he breaks off his own wrist to escape custody!

The police chase leads to Crossways, the home of Dr. Browning. The killer jumps into a trough of acid to escape captivity. With the killer dead, the case is considered closed, but the coroner suspects intrigue, and examines the amputated hand. By night, the jogger's nurse (who has now overseen the amputation of the poor man's arms), steals the hand from the coroner's office!

At the same time, Konratz has traveled to the U.K. to meet with Fremont, a top government official. Konratz demands all materials relating to the vampire murders in trade for the release of a captured spy plane and pilot. With Fremont's permission, Konratz takes the file, killing Superintendent Bellaver in the process.

Still suspecting foul play, the coroner breaks into Browning's home and finds a high tech laboratory there, as well as a repository of frozen body parts. He is confronted by Browning, who shows him the entire operation. It seems that Browning is part of a special elite of scientists who are building "composite" people: sentient beings assembled from various limbs and body parts. Browning even reveals he is a composite himself, part of what he calls a super race. Unfortunately, Konratz arrives in the laboratory and tells Browning that he and all his kind are expendable. Browning and Konratz then fight, while the coroner and a captive would-be organ bank flee Crossways. Browning kills Konratz, submerging him in a bath of acid, but then Fremont—another composite man—arrives to kill Browning. Fremont tells the coroner that the affair is not over, that it is "just beginning."

COMMENTARY: Gordon Hessler's *Scream and Scream Again* has one nifty and rather ghoulish visual joke in it. A healthy-looking jogger collapses during an afternoon run, and awakens in a hospital to find that one of his legs has been amputated without his knowledge (or permission). Later in the film, the jogger awakens again, to find his other leg missing. When the audience next sees the poor man, he is missing both arms. *Scream and scream again*, literally! Alas, the rest of this film does not live up to that moment of Grand Guignol humor. Worse, it squanders the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and Vincent Price interacting on film, making it a missed opportunity rather than the high-water genre mark it aimed to be.

To fully understand a critic's frustration with *Scream and Scream Again*, one must only consider expectations. Price, Cushing and Lee are the great horror icons of the 1960s and 1970s. Price for his Poe roles and *Phibes* films; Cushing for his efforts as Dr. Frankenstein and Van Helsing; and Lee as (arguably) the greatest screen Dracula of all time. What a coup to have signed these three stars for one film! Price's devilish humor, Cushing's genteel determination, Lee's overt physical presence and menace ... just imagine how those qualities might have played out in full-blooded scene after dramatic scene.

Now, keep imagining, because none of those scenes exist in *Scream*

and Scream Again. Peter Cushing appears as a Nazi-like officer in only one scene (before being killed by a technique that resembles Mr. Spock's famous Vulcan nerve pinch...), and doesn't get to share the screen with either Price or Lee. Vincent Price appears at the start of the film, and also has a significant presence at the denouement, but is otherwise missing in action. As for Lee, he appears a few times (perhaps four), all in the latter half of the picture, but shares just one (brief) moment with Price. What a disappointment! The icons never work in combination, and a great opportunity is lost. Although it is better to judge a film on what it does, rather than what it fails to do, it is difficult to forgive a movie that makes a blunder like this ... even if the rest of the picture is exemplary (which it isn't).

Foremost among the film's problems is its so-called plot (or rather plots, since there seem to be about four of them...). There are the goings-on in an unidentified eastern European country modeled after Nazi Germany (down to swastika-like symbols on blazing red arm bands), as an officer tortures refugees (Yutte Stensgaard in a cameo), kills his superiors (including Cushing), and plots some kind of military and political upheaval. In addition to being boring and mostly indecipherable, these sequences go nowhere and have little bearing on the remainder of the film. Then there's poor Christopher Lee, laboring through his very dry espionage subplot ... mostly sitting behind a desk and answering the phone. Then there is a subplot about a serial killer called the "Vampire Murderer," and the police attempts to catch him before he kills again. Then there is Price as Dr. Browning, a suspicious character working up something strange in his laboratory. Then there's the young coroner trying to solve the case. Finally, there is the revelation of a conspiracy of super-intelligent, super-strong supermen sewn from stolen body parts (hence the jogger's unfortunate limb deficiency). *Scream and Scream Again* has an excess of plots, but none of them are handled with much flair. Audiences need a note pad to keep up with all the various threads. The destination is not worth the complexity of the trip.

Scream and Scream Again plays like a James Bond film without James Bond, for there is a plot to rule the world, yet no worthy or interesting hero to step in and fight it. And, like the James Bond

films, *Scream and Scream Again* suffers from what Roger Ebert calls the “Fallacy of the Talking Villain.” At the end of the picture, mad-scientist Vincent Price confronts the young coroner (a deadly bland Christopher Matthews) and invites him to look over his secret operation. Then, in detail, Price explains everything to the young man, making sure to leave no detail out. Of course, the coroner is able to escape eventually, whereas if Price had just killed the guy before talking, his plan might not have been jeopardized...

Scream and Scream Again also fails to convince in its scientific thesis. The ultimate point of the film is that man should not tamper in God’s domain by building supermen out of human spare parts. That is fine, but today it seems a thematic dead end. In 2000, audiences understand that if a super race is created, it will happen courtesy of DNA and genetic engineering, not the sewing together of spare parts. Even in 1970 such a plot does not really hold up well. How does a “new” superman, assembled from spare parts, become a different sentient individual if the brain in use is from another (already living) human being? Would not you merely have another person’s brain inside a super powerful new body, rather than a new personality who is consciously part of a master race and its conspiracy? And why no seams? If these folks are sewn together from spare parts like the Frankenstein monster, should not there be physical remnants or traces of the surgical procedure? If not seams, then how about scars? As was stated so eloquently in *Spinal Tap*, there is a fine line between stupid and clever, and *Scream and Scream Again* crosses that line.

Besides an exciting car chase and the extended pursuit of a super being who is difficult to injure, let alone capture, *Scream and Scream Again* is more baffling than intriguing. In some fan circles, the film enjoys a reputation as being quite good, a classic even. One has to wonder how that assessment was reached, as the film is resolutely style-less and lacking in pace. Throw in an ineffective, overly cumbersome plot, a ridiculous scientific resolution to the mystery, and a failure to exploit the presence of three genre greats, and one is left feeling *suspiciously* like that poor jogger ... as if pieces are missing.

Shock Waves (1970) * * *

Cast and Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (S.S. Commandant); Brook Adams (Rose); Fred Buch (Chuck); Jack Davidson (Norman); Luke Halpin (Keith); D.J. Sidney (Beverly); Don Stout (Dobbs); John Carradine (Captain); Clarence Thomas (Fisherman); With: Sammy Graham, Preston White, Reid Finger, Mike Kennedy, Donahue Guillory, Jay Maeder, Talmadge Scott, Gary Levinson, Robert Miller.

CREW: A Joseph Brenner Associates Inc., Release. *Music:* Richard Einhorn. *Screenplay:* John Harrison, Ken Wiederhorn. *Produced by:* Reuben Trane. *Directed by:* Ken Wiederhorn. *Film Editor:* Norman Gray. *Director of Photography:* Reuben Trane. *Underwater Photography:* Irving Pare. *Production Design:* Jessica Sack. *Make-up Design:* Alan Ormsby. *Assistant to Producer:* Rosanne Hemming. *Assistant Director:* George Berndt. *Production Manager:* Doug Kauffman. *Unit Manager:* Wayne Hood. *Second Assistant Director:* Roger Skelton. *Assistant Editor:* Greg Sheldon. *Assistant Cameraman:* Tom Schroeppel. *Apprentice Editor:* Eva Gardos, Denine Rowan. *Script Supervisor:* Dee Miller. *Continuity:* Jacque Kegeles. *Chief Electrician:* Gerry Rhodes. *Prop Master:* Mykie Metlee. *Sound Recordist:* Stephen Manners. *Boom Man:* Parris Buckner. *Production Assistant:* Daryl Polan. *Grips:* Eric Lacor, Frank Smithers. *Production Assistants:* Jennie Jerome, Gene Picchi, Laurie Latarelli, John O'Gorman, Terry Twyman. *Sound Mix:* Emil Neroda. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 86 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Two fishermen rescue a beautiful woman, Rose, out of a lifeboat, and she tells them a bizarre and frightening story.

Rose was on the second day of a diving boat expedition when the ship's motor broke. Rose and her friends heard a rumbling under the ramshackle vessel, and demanded that their cranky captain leave the area. The compass malfunctioned too, and the ship was lost in unknown waters. By night, the diving boat collided with a massive, rusted old ship, and the crew was forced to abandon their vehicle for a small tropical island. The captain did not survive the evacuation.

Disturbed, Rose and her cohorts, Chuck, Keith, Beverly and Norman, moved inland, and discovered a rotted out old hotel in the forest. There was only one inhabitant: a Nazi S.S. commander, a crazed scientist. This old, scarred man allowed the marooned vacationers to bunk down in the ruined hotel for the night, but had a disturbing secret to share. Many years earlier, during World War II, he had engineered a platoon of Nazi amphibian storm troopers. This S.S. death corps could breathe underwater, and thus function as the perfect soldiers. Unfortunately, the soldiers had become dangerously unpredictable, and were exiled from Germany before they could harm the very people they had been created to protect. Now, the platoon inhabited the deepest regions of the sea, and the rusted old ship that the diving boat collided with. With a taste for murder, these insane soldiers would soon come after the new inhabitants of the island.

At this terrible news, Rose and her friends decided to flee for a lifeboat on the far side of the island. The tourists were hunted through the woods by the inhuman Nazi soldiers and the soldiers even murdered their former commandant! The fleeing vacationers became caught in a patch of mud, and had to drag the boat to open sea. Unfortunately, they were again confronted by the death corps, this time in the surf. When the boat was inadvertently lost, the survivors split up and returned to the island. The Nazis soon killed Norman, the smart-ass of the bunch.

Rose was attacked, but she ripped off her assailant's goggles, and blinded him. Apparently, the Nazi zombies had adapted to the murkiness at the bottom of the sea, and were unable to face clear sunlight. The survivors then held up in the commander's hotel as the Nazi zombies surrounded the building. Rose and the others

locked themselves in a massive refrigerator behind a reinforced door as the zombies trashed the hotel. Chuck, a claustrophobic, held Rose and the others at gunpoint and forced his friends to flee the freezer after firing a flare inside it.

The Nazi death troopers seized the next opportunity to kill Chuck. They then drowned Beverly, leaving Keith and Rose the last chance to escape. They managed to get to a life raft from their boat, the *Bonaventure*, and make for the ocean. One last sentry attacked, killing Keith, leaving Rose alone to tell the tale of Nazi evil that still survives at the bottom of a turbulent sea...

COMMENTARY: If only TV's reality show *Survivor* (2000) had been as gripping as 1970's *Shock Waves*, a nightmarish "zombie" movie in which unsuspecting vacationers are voted off the island (and off the mortal coil...) by a team of automaton-like mutant Nazis...

Sure, this is a low-budget exploitation film with a ludicrous B-movie premise (underwater fascist ghouls...), but director Ken Wiederhorn handily carries the film beyond so silly-sounding a premise, marshalling all of his creative resources to engender feelings of true suspense and danger. Although on the surface this is a movie boasting that favorite '70s horror trope, "science gone awry," it actually generates the same kind of random-feeling terror as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) by introducing the world to a variation on the idea of faceless, homicidal goons. They're not cannibalistic flesh-eaters, sure, but the effect is not far different. The intense creep factor in *Shock Waves* comes from the evil death corps lurking underwater, undetected, and popping up to strangle unsuspecting humans. Whenever you least suspect it, there's a ghoul waiting to pull you down to the depths ... and that's scary stuff. But the other important point is that these Nazis are not at all individualized as people, so there is no identification with them (as one might feel sympathy or empathy for Dracula or the Frankenstein monster). Instead, these pale, emotionless antagonists remain emotionally distant, breaking the glassy water surface to hunt in a pack like *Star Trek's* popular Borg villains. They have no names, no personalities, and no individuality, but they strike in tandem, and are dedicated to the extermination of the victims. They make for great villains.

And, who can deny that there's something intrinsically terrifying

about the water, a realm in which humans naturally feel quite endangered? *Shock Waves*, like *Jaws* (1975), remembers that humans don't have a home field advantage when tromping through rivers or paddling through a vast ocean. Water slows us down, discomforts us, and is a perfect hiding place for predators. Evoking memories of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), which also traded on such feelings of unease about "what dwells beneath," there is a tantalizing and troubling image in *Shock Waves* as lovely Brook Adams bathes in a black stream, the water looking thick, viscous and wholly mysterious. The scene ends when she swims into a dead body (the cook), but before that crescendo, the film captures the beauty and danger of a remote swimming hole where relaxation may turn to terror.

"The sea spits up what it can't keep down," states one of the characters early in the film, and that's a perfect metaphor for *Shock Waves*' use of water as an arena for terror. Though uniformed, jackbooted, goggled underwater Nazis sound like really stupid antagonists, the film is successful because it co-joins fear of the water with these ridiculous-seeming, but deadly serious villains, and does so with a straight face. Peter Cushing, horror's old friend, lends the film further authenticity by offering (in his own inimitable fashion) tons of exposition about the Nazis, building up the audience's feelings of terror.

It's a perfect recipe for a solid horror movie: a favorite performer (Cushing), a popular threat (zombies), a remote location (a tropical island), and an arena which gives audiences reason to pause (the murky depths of the ocean). Add a beautiful star (Adams), and some suspenseful, frightening murders, and *Shock Waves* represents a great day at the beach for horror fans.

***Trog* (1970) * ***

Cast & Credits

CAST: Joan Crawford (Dr. Brockton); Michael Gough (Sam Murdock); Bernard Kay (Inspector Greenham); Kim Braden (Anne Brockton); David Griffin (Malcolm Travers); John Hamill (Cliff);

Thorley Walters (Magistrate); Jack May (Dr. Selbourne); Geoffrey Case (Bill); Robert Hutton (Dr. Richard Hutton); Simon Lack (Colonel Vickers); David Warbeck (Alan Davis); Chloe Francis (Little Girl); Maurice Good (Reporter); Joe Cornelius (Trog).

CREW: A Herman Cohen Production, *Trog*.
Associate Producer: Harry Woolveridge. *Art Director:* Geoffrey Tozer. *Film Editor:* Oswald Hafenrichter.
Trog Designed by: Charles Parker. *Production Manager:* Eddie Dorian. *Camera Operator:* Norman Jones. *Casting:* Maud Spector. *Director of Photography:* Desmond Dickinson. *Music:* John Scott. *Screenplay:* Aben Kandel. *Original Story:* Peter Bryan and John Gilling. *Produced by:* Herman Cohen. *Directed by:* Freddie Francis. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 91 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Three amateur prospectors, Cliff, Billy and Malcolm, discover a fissure leading down into an ancient, untouched cavern. After traversing an underground spring, they discover a prehistoric ape-man dwelling inside the deep cave. Terrified by the intrusion of modern man into his solitary world, the apeman kills Billy while Malcolm and Cliff escape.

Malcolm, a student in zoology, takes the injured Cliff to the nearby Brockton Research Center, where the world's foremost anthropologist, Dr. Brockton, is fascinated to hear the story of a creature she believes is the missing link. Brockton returns to the cave with Malcolm and photographs the creature, which she calls a "trog," half-man/half ape. Trog is a cave dweller, maybe thawed out from an age 10 million years earlier.

The police, the press, Brockton and curious locals descend on Trog's cave in an attempt to capture him. Though Trog injures a police diver and wrecks some TV equipment, he finally works his way out of the cave, seeking escape. Brockton uses a hypo-gun to tranquilize the creature, and takes him back to her laboratory for study.

Brockton, Malcolm, and Brockton's daughter, Ann, collaborate with

the stuffy Dr. Selbourne to train and domesticate Trog. Brockton believes Trog is the missing link, and that he can be trained to reveal the earliest chapters of human evolution and history. But a closed-minded local, Sam Murdock, doesn't like the attention Trog has received and wants the creature destroyed. Soon, a jealous Dr. Selbourne joins forces with Murdock to discredit Brockton, and a public court of inquiry is convened to determine the disposition of Trog. While the court hears evidence, Dr. Brockton and a team of scientists operate on his vocal cords to grant the apeman the power of speech.

When Brockton gains worldwide respect and admiration for her work with Trog, Murdock takes matters into his own hands. He breaks into the Brockton lab and wrecks it. He then sets Trog free to take the blame for the destruction, but Trog escapes and murders Murdock instead.

Now local authorities have just the excuse they need to execute Trog, and the police hunt him down. Trog goes on a murder spree in the nearby village and kidnaps a little blond girl from a playground. Terrified, Trog retreats to his cave. The police surround the hole, and Brockton steals into the fissure to rescue the child. Brockton secures Trog's release, but once she has escaped from the cave, a demolition squad blasts open a larger entrance. Soldiers descend into the cave in force and open fire on Trog with machine guns. Riddled with bullets, Trog falls to his death in the cave.

COMMENTARY: Joan Crawford's final film, *Trog*, starts with a strong narrative pull. Three amateur prospectors find a cavern, and explore it, only to find a cave man, Trog, dwelling deep below the surface of the Earth. This very premise recalls a more innocent time in film history, when audiences could suspend disbelief enough to believe that it was possible to jump down a cave, explore a new place, and make a great discovery around the next turn. It's evocative of Jules Verne and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. There's something terribly innocent and charming about this notion of a world-beneath-the-world, and *Trog* benefits from it. It's an innocent sort of film, and its heart is in the right place.

But, sadly, *Trog* is also a terribly naïve, brainless sort of film. For instance, much is made in the film of a deadly serious court of

inquiry to determine if *Trog* should live or die. Only in a bad horror film would such a creature's existence even be a point of debate. The eyes of the world would be on this momentous project, and the public (not to mention the scientific community or the national government...) would never permit so valuable a specimen as Trog to be executed. This plot exists in the film simply to raise tension. It's a B-movie gimmick, pure and simple. If the community that found Trog were really that afraid of the beast, he'd be transported to London, or the United States, or to any zoo in the world with a research branch. *Never* would there be discussion of murdering the world's one and only missing link.

In its sincere naïveté and limited understanding of its own premise, this movie skirts the real significance of Trog's existence. This creature, this "missing link," is the proof the world would need that creationism, and thus Christianity, is nothing but bunk, pure mythology. The villainous Murdock makes plenty of comments in the film about "the Lord," and even quotes from scripture (Genesis, specifically), yet *Trog* never shows either the courage or the wit to tackle what Trog's existence truly represents to the 20th century. He represents a bedrock change in knowledge that fundamentalist parties and religious orders would want to destroy because he challenges their authority, power, and hold over so many people. If the film were about that idea—how *Trog* frightens traditionalists and religious zealots—then it would have been a whole lot more interesting, not to mention smarter. As it stands, Murdock is simply a two-dimensional villain who hates Trog because the screenplay demands it of him. He is evil "just because." As Murdock, Gough is a little over the top too. Apparently, he learned nothing from *Konga*...

For a film that depends so heavily on scientific babble, *Trog* also makes some terrible blunders. For instance, it perpetuates that old movie mistake of putting dinosaurs and primitive man into the same prehistoric epoch. Science seems to have proved that these two species never co-existed, so the trippy scene in which Trog has a "flashback" to a dinosaur fight is a factual mistake. It doesn't work from a plot standpoint either. Trog just suddenly "remembers" a fight amongst the dinosaurs, and then the film cuts to a protracted battle between miniature model dinosaurs fighting in really

dreadful stop-motion animation. This interlude has nothing whatsoever to do with the rest of the film, and goes on at least two minutes too long. It is rather obvious padding to get the film up to a 90-minute length.

The legendary Joan Crawford does her best with *Trog*'s ludicrous screenplay, but her sincerity and passion in the role of Dr. Brockton ill serves a film that is already way too serious. So many scenes border on camp that Crawford's scene-chewing only makes the film seem sillier. Take for instance the moment that Trog sways breezily to classical music, but then reacts badly to rock-'n'-roll. The cast takes it so seriously, but any sensible viewer is tempted to joke that Trog may just be the world's oldest music critic...

Trog's problems are many. The script introduces Malcolm and Ann Brockton as major characters, and then drops them completely. They don't participate in the climax of the film, and have no valedictory scene. Bernard Kay's Inspector Greenham is a problem too, sometimes seeming reasonable; sometimes seeming to be a hard and fast enemy to Trog. Even Crawford's character is somewhat insufferable. She barks orders at her daughter ("Never show fear, only *trust!*"), has her staff fetch things for her ("bring me my hypo gun, quickly!!!"), and is a dyed-in-the-wool know-it-all. One is tempted to think of *Mommie Dearest*, but let's not go there...

Still, even in its worst moments, *Trog* is oddly affecting. Its very innocence is charming in some way. As fake as the Trog make-up looks, the audience bonds with this innocent creature, and doesn't want to see it hurt or exploited. The film features some oddball tenderness to it in that regard. And horror fans will really dig the gory murder sequence in which Trog hangs a troublesome butcher on his own meat hook (forecasting a similarly gruesome murder in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* [1974]).

Ultimately, there's little this critic can state about *Trog* that every critic hasn't already said about the film. In essence, it's a laughable, lowbrow version of *Iceman* (1985). In fact, the outstanding *Iceman* makes *Trog* look like a neanderthal.

***The Vampire Lovers* (1970) * * ***

Cast & Credits

CAST: Ingrid Pitt (Mircalla/Carmilla); George Cole (Morton); Kate O'Mara (Governess); Peter Cushing (the General); Ferdy Mayne (Doctor); Douglas Wilmer (Baron Hartog); Madeline Smith (Emma); Dawn Addams (Countess); Jon Finch (Carl Ebhardt); Pippa Steel (Laura); Kirsten Betts (First Vampire); Janet Key (Gretchin); Harvey Hall (Renton); John Forbes Robertson (Man in Black); Charles Farrell (Landlord); Shelagh Wilcocks (Housekeeper); Graham James (First Young Man); Tom Browne (Second Young Man); Joanna Shelley (Woodman's Daughter); Olga James (Village Girl).

CREW: American International Pictures and Hammer Films Present *The Vampire Lovers*. Based on: J. Sheridan Le Fanu's story "Carmilla." Adapted by: Harry Fine, Tudor Gates, Michael Style. Director of Photography: Moray Grant. Editor: James Needs. Art Director: Scott MacGregor. Costume Design: Brian Cox. Music: Harry Robinson. Music Supervisor: Philip Martell. Production Manager: Tom Sachs. Assistant Director: Derek Whitehurst. Sound Recordist: Claude Hitchcock. Sound Editor: Roy Hyde. Camera Operator: Neil Binney. Continuity: Betty Harley. Make-up: Tom Smith. Screenplay: Tudor Gates. Produced by: Harry Fine, Michael Style. Directed by: Roy Ward Baker. M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Baron Hartog writes in his memoirs of a ferocious battle with the Karnsteins: a family of vampires. Hartog recounts his effort to decapitate a beautiful female vampire, as well as his hope that he has ended the curse for all time.

Years later, a lovely foreign countess arrives at the engagement party of a general's beautiful daughter, Laura. She brings with her the beautiful Mircalla—in truth the Karnstein vampire, Carmilla. Unaware of the danger, the general invites Mircalla to spend the

night in his home when her countess is unexpectedly called away to a funeral. He comes to regret that decision when Mircalla drains the beautiful Laura of blood, killing her. After her death, two puncture marks are found above her breasts, and her fiancé, Carl Ebhardt, swears vengeance.

Mircalla moves on, changing her name to Carmilla. She befriends another innocent girl, Emma Morton, and is invited to stay at the Morton house for a time. The same cycle soon repeats, with Carmilla draining Emma of blood over a period of days. As Emma grows weaker, the house butler, Renton, realizes she is the target of a vampire. He arranges for garlic plants to be brought to her room. These stop Carmilla for a time, but she seduces Renton and the Morton governess in an attempt to get to Emma.

Mr. Morton, Emma's father, joins forces with an aged Baron Hartog, Carl Ebhardt, and the general, to stop the Karnstein evil. They visit the Karnstein castle and gain proof that Mircalla/Carmilla is a vampire. While Carl rides back to the Morton house to save Emma, Carmilla strikes again, killing the local doctor. Later, Carmilla decides to bring Emma back to her castle with her. Carl attempts to stop this voyage, and Carmilla is forced to de-materialize. She re-materializes at her coffin in the Karnstein cemetery, and the general, Morton and Hartog await her arrival. The general stakes Carmilla through the heart in the name of his beloved Laura. Then, in one blow, he decapitates Carmilla, ending the vampire curse ... hopefully.

COMMENTARY: What distinguishes one Hammer film above its brethren, since, to one degree or another, all of the studio's output features the same strengths? Think about it: the Hammer films are inevitably buttressed by a lush, high-quality look, and by indoor studio sets that double as exteriors, yet serve effectively in a stylized way. Perhaps more importantly, just about every individual in the Hammer repertory company knows (and understands) his or her terrain. Peter Cushing, Ingrid Pitt, Christopher Lee and the rest know just how long to hold a sideways glance, how to spin a terrible line into something evocative and meaningful, and how to underplay the most "gonzo" of horror scenes, thereby grounding them in reality. But for this author at least, the Hammer films work

best when something new is thrown into the predictable formula. *The Legend of 7 Golden Vampires* (1974) kicks into high gear with martial arts action, and *Dracula A.D. 1972* transports the vampire count to the “mod” early ’70s in a droll way.

The Vampire Lovers, the first in the Carmilla/Mircalla cycle (followed by the enjoyable romp, *Lust for a Vampire*) is a notch above typical Hammer product in the ’70s for two reasons. Firstly, it makes a star of actress Ingrid Pitt, an actress with not only the beauty and the charisma to play a powerful vampire, but the *gravitas* as well. Secondly, the film has the courage to offer insights about Mircalla’s cursed existence rather than rely merely on bloodletting and breasts (though there is plenty of each on hand, as well).

“I want you to love me for all of your life,” a jealous Mircalla informs Emma, a beautiful young girl destined to be her victim, in *The Vampire Lovers*. “It’s not the same,” Emma replies thoughtlessly, comparing her “fraternal” love for Carmilla to her more romantic feelings for a “boyfriend.” This conversation highlights *The Vampire Lovers*’ interesting decision to confront the sexual preference of its villain, and what it means to her in a society that forbids such “alternative” couplings. For Mircalla genuinely loves Emma and each of the women she seduces and kills. She doesn’t want them to die, but she does not want to lose them (to men) either. If they live, they will be “taken” by their boyfriends, never to be hers again. Yet, if Mircalla murders the girls she desires, draining their blood, they are lost to her as well. What a terrible dilemma! Accordingly, there is serious melancholy in this vampire ... she is truly cursed.



Ingrid Pitt (far left) leads a harem of “innocent” schoolgirls in *The Vampire Lovers* (1970).

In one monologue, Mircalla spells it all out, making it clear that she despises death for the things and people it takes away from her. This awareness of death, of her own role in fostering it, differentiates Mircalla from Hammer’s Dracula. He thrives on death, on the seduction, on the corruption of life. By contrast, one feels of Mircalla that she is a woman trapped by her preferences. Her appetites are unacceptable (i.e. lesbianism/vampirism) in the Victorian age, but she bows to them out of a sense of biological need, out of a sense of desperation, out of a sense of jealousy. In a strange way, that makes this vampire almost human, understandable. Are not all of us, at one time or another, slaves to desire? For most of us, those desires, those appetites, fall into the norm, and are permitted expression in “normal” society (i.e. heterosexuality). But what of those with “alternative” tastes? Are they to hide their needs in dark and secret, like vampires? That is the argument *The Vampire Lovers* makes, and one it states rather successfully.

It is clear that Mircalla despises herself, and how her appetites force her to hurt the very people she longs to share life with. By facing this duality in Mircalla's nature (she is both killer and lover), *The Vampire Lovers* offers something that most Hammer films lack: subtext. It is not all period detail, lush forestry, and beautiful woman. There's a point to the violence, to the terror, and that makes it a worthwhile character study, and consequently a worthwhile film.

And, Ingrid Pitt is the perfect actress to present the material. She can be seductress and vampire, or tragic anti-hero, depending on how the audience seeks to view her. Her portrayal has layers, something that cannot be said for the fetching Yutte Stensgaard in *Lust for a Vampire*. In that film, one does not really understand who Mircalla is, or why she is that way. But Pitt is the better actress, a strong central presence that dominates the film in an unusually masculine way. She has the raw power a vampire should embody, but is burdened with the seeds of a conscience as well. Pitt gives it her all, embodying both vampire and lover, and this film is all the stronger for it.

The rest of the movie is, alas, your standard vampire stuff. Peter Cushing is around as an aggrieved father, out for revenge, and there are the requisite shots of Pitt's breasts and pubic zone, but *The Vampire Lovers* works well because it re-captures the core of the vampire ethos: the haunted soul, the eternal torment, the love forever lost. Mircalla is beautiful, powerful, and even evil, but tortured too. *The Vampire Lovers* works best when it remembers that even in monsters, the audience looks for identification, for itself.

1971

The Abominable Dr. Phibes (1971) * * *

Critical Reception

“...the plot, buried under all the iron tinsel, isn't bad. But the tone of steam roller camp flattens the

fun. Price finally climbs into his own grave to the tune of 'Over the Rainbow.' Up the creek is more like it."—Howard Thompson, *New York Times*, August 5, 1971, page 25.

"...cult camp horror, with Price in fine fettle.... Often amusing, occasionally sickening, always impressive for the imagination of the Art Deco sets, it's pretty flatly directed."—Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 3.

"...the last great grandstand of perennial ham Vincent Price. It is a delicious camp film about a deformed music genius.... It also features a wonderful parade of Art Deco backgrounds, some imaginative deaths, thefts from a dozen famous films, trivia-wise horror dialogue, and a Busby Berkeley extravaganza at the end ... the only horror film that feels like a musical."—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst, Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 136.

"While never really scary, this is probably the most stylish horror film of the decade, with an evil villain you can't help but love. It's hard to imagine anyone other than Vincent Price in the title role—never was his scenery chewing more appropriate. As a precursor to the *Friday the 13th* series, where the murder scenes *were* the movies, this film showed murder in the hands of an artist, harkening to Nicholson's Joker and Hopkins' Hannibal Lecter to come. Along with *Theatre of Blood* and *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*, this is probably a much more influential film than people realize, particularly in the 1980s...."—Bill Latham, author of *Mary's Monster*, Powys Books.

"Directed flamboyantly by Robert Fuest. Aided by ... clever makeup, Price, without any dialogue, manages to be both terrifying and hilarious.... As a

parody, the camp film works very well.”—Frank Manchel, *An Album of Modern Horror Films*, Franklin Watts Publisher, 1983, page 71.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Vincent Price (Dr. Anton Phibes); Joseph Cotten (Dr. Vesalius); Hugh Griffith (Rabbi); Terry-Thomas (Dr Longstreet); Peter Jeffrey (Trout); Derek Godfrey (Crow); Norman Jones (Schenley); John Cater (Waverley); Aubrey Woods (Goldsmith); John Laurie (Darrow); Maurice Kaufmann (Dr. Whitcombe); Barbara Keogh (Mrs. Fraley); Sean Bury (Lem); Charles Farrell (Chauffeur); Susan Travers (Nurse Alen); David Hutcheson (Dr. Hedgepath); Edward Burnham (Dr. Dunwoody); Alex Scott (Dr. Hargreaves); Peter Gilmore (Dr. Kifaj); Virginia Noth (Vulnavia); Alan Zipson (1st Police Officer); Dallas Adams (2nd Police Officer); James Grout (Sergeant); Alister Williamson, Thomas Heathcoate, Ian Marter, Julian Grant (Police); John Franklyn (Graveyard Attendant); Walter Harsbrugh (Butler).

CREW: American International Pictures and James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff Present *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*. *Production Manager:* Richard Dalton. *Assistant Director:* Frank Ernst. *Continuity:* Gladys Goldsmith. *Casting Director:* Sally Nicholl. *Director of Photography:* Norman Warwick. *Camera Operator:* Godfrey Godar. *Camera Assistant:* Steve Clayton. *Make-up:* Trevor Crole-Rees. *Hairdresser:* Bernadette Ibbetson. *Sets:* Brian Eatwell. *Assistant Art Director:* Christopher Burke. *Wardrobe:* Elsa Fennell. *Special Effects:* Geoerge Blackwell. *Properties:* Rex Hobbs. *Editor:* Tristram Cones. *Sound Recordist:* Denis Whitlock. *Dubbing Editor:* Peter Lennard. *Music Composed and arranged by:* Basil Kirchin *in association with:* Jack Nathan. *Written by:* James Whiton and William Goldstein. *Executive*

Producers: Samuel Z. Arkoff, James H. Nicholson.
Produced by: Louis M. Heyward and Donald S. Dunas. *Directed by:* Robert Fuest. The Producers wish to thank the Big Three Music Company for Permission to Use the Following Songs: "What Can I Say Dear After I Say I'm Sorry," "Dark Town Strutters Ball," "Close Your Eyes," "Elmer's Tune," "All I Do Is Dream of You," "You Stepped Out of a Dream," "Charmaine," "100 Years from Today," "Over the Rainbow." Made on Location and at the EMI-MGM Elstree Studios Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, England. An American International Picture Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the 1930s, someone is going to extraordinary lengths to arrange and orchestrate horrible, elaborate deaths for the most prominent surgeons of London. One doctor is stung to death by bees in his library, and another has his face shredded by hungry bats in his bedroom. Then, at a costume ball, a psychiatrist named Hargreaves has his head crushed by a collapsible frog mask. The same dark perpetrator then invades the home of Dr. Longstreet and exsanguinates the good doctor, leaving several bottles of his blood on the mantle. The London police investigate this series of crimes against the medical profession and seek the assistance of Dr. Vesalius, an associate of all the dead medicos.

At the next crime scene, an amulet is found with a Hebrew mark emblazoned on it. This mark signifies "blood" and relates directly to the ten curses visited upon the pharaohs before Exodus. These curses are Blood, Bats, Frogs, Rats, Hail, Beasts, Locusts, Death of a Firstborn, and finally, Darkness. Someone has been murdering members of the medical community by these very curses! As Vesalius puts the pieces together, he realizes that all the doctors had one patient in common: Victoria Regina Phibes, who underwent surgery with nine professionals, but died nonetheless. Her case was a strange one because her husband, Dr. Phibes, died in a horrible car fire on his way to see her. Now Phibes has returned, apparently quite alive, to seek revenge against the surgical team that caused the death of his beloved wife.

Using a portable air conditioning unit, Phibes next arranges a curse of hail on one of the unsuspecting men he deems responsible for Victoria's death. The police and Dr. Vesalius go to the Phibes family tomb to examine the bodies of Phibes and his wife, but they find only ashes in his crypt, and come to suspect that Dr. Phibes did not die in the terrible fire. That Victoria's body is missing from her coffin also seems to confirm their suspicions that Phibes is somehow involved. Before the police can save another endangered medico, Phibes kills him by loading his airplane cockpit with hungry rats! The police next put Dr. Wickham under police custody, but Phibes gets to him easily.

Next up on Dr. Phibes' hit list is a nurse who participated in the surgery of Victoria. The evil doctor gains access to her bedroom and lets a horde of locusts have a go at her face. At this point, Dr. Vesalius, who was the chief surgeon on Victoria's case, realizes he is next line for gruesome treatment. He realizes his curse is to be the death of the firstborn son, so he races home, but finds that Phibes has already kidnapped his adolescent boy. Soon, Phibes telephones Vesalius and plays him some ominous organ music before telling him that the nine responsible for his wife's death will soon be dead. He then informs Vesalius to come alone to his house if he wants to see his son alive again. Against the better judgment of the police, Vesalius goes to the Phibes residence. In the art deco mansion, Phibes shows Vesalius his son, who is strapped to a table. Phibes makes the good doctor perform heart surgery to remove a key from the boy's chest that will free him from the operating table. If Vesalius should fail the operation, acid will spill down on the boy's face from an elaborate device suspended above him.

Phibes also reveals his true face to Vesalius: he is horribly mutilated from the car fire and is little more than a monster. His vocal cords were destroyed, but he manages to speak via a device of his own creation that operates on the principles of acoustics, music and sound waves.

Working under intense pressure, Vesalius manages to acquire the key and save his son. When he is attacked by Vulnavia, Phibes' beautiful assistant and co-perpetrator, Vesalius is shocked to see the acid fall down on her face ... scorching and killing her.

Considering his job of revenge done, Phibes joins his dead wife on an elaborate bed, replacing his own blood with embalming fluid, all to the strains of “Over the Rainbow.”

COMMENTARY: Some horror movies are critic-proof. *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* is one of them. The film’s plot consists of nothing but one spectacular murder scene after the other, with the inimitable Vincent Price at the center of it all, playing camp and having fun. Subtext? *Nope*. Deeper meaning? *Not really*. But it is a fun picture, and sometimes, that’s enough. No, the movie does not combine editing, pace, or interesting angles to create a frightening meaningful picture in the tradition of *The Exorcist*, or even Fuest’s previous picture, *And Soon the Darkness*. It relies instead on inventive horror setpieces, a deranged musical score, and fantastic art deco sets. Welcome everyone, to *Phantom of the Opera* meets Busby Berkeley!

Perhaps more accurately, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* is the horror equivalent of a James Bond film: a charismatic super character (antagonist Phibes) goes on a visually stunning, action-packed adventure, encountering thrilling locations, and high production values. For those who want nothing more out of a genre flick, this is your movie.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about *Phibes* is its context, the climate in which it was born. In the early 1970s, filmmakers were casting about for a new horror franchise that could supplant the monsters of old. Dracula, the Mummy, the Wolfman, and Frankenstein had worn out their welcome through umpteen Universal and Hammer films, and besides, these familiar icons did not necessarily speak to the concerns of a modern audience. So, something new was needed to stir the blood. Accordingly then, in just the first three years of the ’70s, the “new” franchises were born. Most of them didn’t survive beyond one sequel, but along they came nonetheless. Transmutations of Dracula came in the form of *Count Yorga*, *Vampire*, the Mircalla films (*The Vampire Lovers*, *Lust for a Vampire*, *Twins of Evil*), *Blacula*, and the *Dark Shadows* motion picture.

Among these attempts to create a new horror villain was *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* and its sequel, *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*. The

Phibes films exist solely to depict a charismatic star (Price) committing inventive murders against a percentage of the community (doctors, theater critics, competitors) who were perceived to have done the main character wrong. Humor is highlighted as the “bad” people get their just deserts at the hand of the equally bad Price. It’s as simple a formula as that.

But just because the equation is a simple one should not rule out *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* as a bad film. To the contrary, one can see its myriad good qualities simply by looking ahead to the following decade, the 1980s. One of the most popular franchises of that era was *Friday the 13th*. Now, there was a film series lacking a charismatic monster (the silent serial killer Jason), any interesting music (beyond the trademark Manfredini theme, *chee chee, hah hah*), and even a varied setting. Film after film featured the same bland monster killing the same group of protagonists (stupid teens), in the same locale (Camp Crystal Lake). So, in just a decade, the *Phibes* formula had degenerated to true blandness. Compared to any *Friday the 13th* film, *Phibes* is indeed high art. In fairness, the *Elm Street* saga of the 1980s had more success aping the *Phibes* equation, featuring a truly imaginative villain (Robert Englund’s dream stalker Freddy Krueger), and diverse settings (a plethora of character-driven dreamscapes). Still, *Phibes* has one element that most of the later *Elm Street* movies lack: class! The film looks as though it were made by a director, not a special effects team, and there is an overriding intelligence behind the scenes, one with flashes of wit.

Ironically, *Phibes*, *Blacula*, *Yorga* and the rest of the ’70s would-be icons did not survive the decade, primarily because their creators made a serious miscalculation. What was coming to scare audiences in the ’70s was random violence (a shark attack, a rape, inexplicable murders in rural Texas), not these larger-than-life super characters that seemed so far away from everyday reality. In a world with *Jaws*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Last House on the Left*, and the rest, vampires, and monsters of *Phibes*’ ilk inevitably looked quaint and charming in comparison, even silly sometimes. They lost their power to scare. Today these films are remembered with nostalgia by the generation that grew up with them, but ask anyone without that pre-disposition of nostalgia to watch these

horror films, and wait for the response. These films just ain't scary.

What is there to like about *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*? Well, the film cleverly notes that Phibes succeeds on his murderous rampages because of his maniacal precision, his obsession with planning, and by following his own blueprints. It likewise notes that the only way to stop him is to mess up his standards, so he can't continue his plan. That alone is a clever conceit, because it requires the film, like Phibes himself, to have a plan. So many horror films unfold seemingly at random, where anything and everything is possible. *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* visits the ten curses of the pharaohs upon its victims, thus providing an admirable umbrella of consistency.

Once the outline is known, the audience preps itself for the inevitable: the curse of the locusts, the curse of rats, the curse of hail. In hinting to the audience what will come, *Phibes* is actually clever because it then has the opportunity to play with expectations. Anticipating one kind of death, the audience is surprised when things unfold unpredictably, with a different victim, or a "red herring." Perhaps that is not much of a "rave" review, but audiences generally want a roller coaster ride when they see a horror film. They want to be scared, grossed out, surprised, and amused. *Phibes* never manages to be scary, but it is gross, surprising and amusing. Three out of four isn't bad.

LEGACY: *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* was hugely successful with horror fans and critics alike, and the mad Doctor returned to bloody action in *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972). The notion of Vincent Price essaying a villain who kills his victims in amusing manner was then picked up in another '70s picture, *Theatre of Blood* (1973). More recently, the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films showcased a Phibes-like anti-hero, a tongue-in-cheek murderer (Freddy Krueger) who indulged in murderous, spectacular setpieces, with tongue planted firmly in cheek. A third *Phibes* film was listed briefly as a possible George Romero project, *Phibes Resurrected*, in the mid-'80s, but it was never produced.

The Andromeda Strain (1971) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...spends millions to mask its grade-B origins. Beneath its extravagant collection of computer read-out screens and space lab gadgets beats the heart of a golden oldie it-came-from-outer-space melodrama. Full of the dazzling scientific lingo and simple suspense that makes this genre so endearing.... Director Robert Wise brings the highest professionalism to this adaptation of Michael Crichton’s best seller.”—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: “The Germonauts,” March 29, 1971, page 98.

“...the year’s best sci-fier. It could have been better acted, but it could not have been better art-directed (William Tuntke) ... several sequences are gripping.”—Daphne Norris, *Films in Review*, Volume XXII, Number 4, April 1971.

“Director Robert Wise didn’t miss a trick. His actors ... are not superstars, but they are solid performers all. His sets are superb and thoroughly convincing, his photography is striking, and the story, based on the bestseller by Michael Crichton, is gripping, intelligent and frightening.”—Jeff Rovin, *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction Films*, Citadel Press, 1975, page 193.

“*The Andromeda Strain*’s ending is somewhat anticlimactic ... but James Olson, Arthur Hill, David Wayne and Kate Reid deliver controlled performances as scientists who have become dominated by technology itself.... The settings are stark and antiseptic-looking, and the electronic gadgetry is worth the great expense.”—Gregory B. Richards, *Great Science Fiction Movies*, Gallery Books, 1984, page 51.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Arthur Hill (Dr. Jeremy Stone); David

Wayne (Dr. Charles Dutton); James Olson (Dr. Mark Hall); Kate Reid (Dr. Ruth Leavitt); Paula Kelly (Karen Anson); George Mitchell (Jackson); Ramon Bieri (Major Manchek); Kermit Murdock (Dr. Robertson); Richard O'Brien (Grimes); Peter Hobbs (General Sparks); Eric Christmas (Senator from Vermont); With: Ken Swofford, Michael Pataki.

CREW: A Universal Release of a Robert Wise Production, *The Andromeda Strain*. *Production Designer:* Boris Leven. *Director of Photography:* Richard B. Kline. *Film Editors:* Stuart Gilmore, John W. Holmes. *Special Photographic Effects:* Douglas Trumbull, James Shourt. *Technical Advisors:* Dr. Richard Green, George Hobby, William Koselka. *Scientific Background Support:* Cal Tech, Jet Propulsion Laboratory. *Costumes:* Helen Colvig. *Set Decorator:* Ruby Levitt. *Production Manager:* Ernest B. Wehmeyer. *Assistant Director:* Ridgeway Callow. *Matte Supervisor:* Albert Whitlock. *Script Supervisor:* Marie Kenney. *Music Engineering:* Allan Sohl and Gordon Clark. *Art Director:* William Tuntke. *Production Illustrator:* Thomas Wright. *Make-up:* Bud Westmore. *Hairstylist:* Larry Germain. *Titles and Opticals:* Universal Title/Attila de Lado. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Color:* Technicolor. Animal Sequences filmed under the supervision of the A.S.P.C.A, W. M. Blackmore. *Scientific Equipment:* Korad Lasers, Pekin-Elmer Corporation, Central Research Labs, Inc., R.C.A., Concord Electricity Corporation, Du Pont, Van Waters and Rogers Corporation, Technicon Corporation, Honeywell Corporation. *Music:* Gil Melle. *From the novel by:* Michael Crichton. *Screenplay:* Nelson Gidding. *Directed by:* Robert Wise. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* G. *Running time:* 130 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: All the citizens of Piedmont, New Mexico, die after a United States satellite carrying a strange micro-organism crashes in

town. An Army recovery team learns of the tragedy and immediately calls up an alert. A team of scientists including leader Jeremy Stone, surgeon Mark Hall, and experts Charlie Dutton and Ruth Leavitt, are rounded up to study the offending organism.

In protective suits, Hall and Stone make a sweep of Piedmont, and study the dead town. They discover hundreds of corpses whose blood has clotted and turned to powder. They also locate two survivors: a baby and an old man named Jackson. With these survivors in tow, Hall and Stone proceed to Nevada, where a secret underground laboratory consisting of five levels has been constructed. During a decontamination process that lasts 16 hours, Stone tells Hall that he is to be “the odd man”: the one person in the installation who has the power (and the key) to disarm the nuclear self destruct device in case of emergency.

Leavitt, Dutton, Stone and Hall commence their study of the plague survivors and the satellite in extremely sterile environs, using the latest in technological advances. They soon learn that the lethal organism transmits itself by air, and that it is approximately 2 microns in diameter. They also find an indentation in the satellite collector scoop, thereby locating a green organism that seems to be growing. Meanwhile, Hall tries to understand the connection between the old man (a sterno drinker) and the baby. Why were they protected from the germ?

In a different study, Ruth Leavitt searches for something that will prevent the growth of the organism and misses an important sample because of a secret condition: epilepsy.

Before long, the space-borne entity is given the code name Andromeda. The team views Andromeda under an electron microscope and determines that it has a crystalline structure; one that is constantly mutating and dividing. It can grow in a vacuum, and is accelerated by exposure to energy. Worse, a super-colony of it has formed over the Pacific Coast, and is growing larger.

With time growing short, Dr. Hall realizes that acidity and blood chemistry play a role in Andromeda’s survival. It can only survive within a narrow range of pH levels. Environments too acid or too alkaline destroy it. This fact saves Dutton’s life when he is

inadvertently exposed to the bug. Another problem surfaces, however, when Andromeda mutates again and melts all the plastic seals in the laboratory. This contamination triggers the self-destruct nuclear machine at the lab's heart. This is an especially big problem because Andromeda would actually thrive and grow in the energy released by a nuclear blast!

Hall battles defensive lasers, stun gas, and other hazards to prevent the installation from triggering the growth of Andromeda. He is successful ... with 8 seconds to spare.

The immediate danger gone, the scientists set out to destroy the Andromeda supercolony by seeding the clouds above it, and forcing the organism into the salty environment of the sea.

COMMENTARY: Readers might fairly wonder why *The Andromeda Strain*, most often viewed as a science fiction film, is reviewed at all in this book about "horror." The answer comes down to motivation and intent. This is a movie about (in the words of director Robert Wise) "the first crisis of the space-age." Andromeda is a biological crisis, and one with a frightening impact on the human race. The concept of an alien micro-organism is used in the film not so much to enlighten, illuminate and generate wonder (all hallmarks of science fiction), but to cause deep fear and insecurity about man's place in the universe, and even here on Earth. With its suspense, its grisly town of the dead, and its thesis of a threatened mankind, it is no strain to see *Andromeda* as an incredibly effective horror piece.

The Andromeda Strain sets up a very interesting dynamic. The film loves its science and techno jargon, wallowing in the details of man-made machinery at the expense of natural beauty. At the same time, the film assesses humans as innately flawed creatures who cannot deal effectively with the perfect tools they have created. It is clear even from the opening sequence that director Wise idolizes the machines and technology his camera captures, and in the film's trailer he pointedly refers to the Wildfire underground laboratory as "the star" of his film. Accordingly, the opening credits depict technology in literally glowing terms, as art even, in an overlapping, colorful montage of images. It is a swirl of vivid contrasting shades and movements, yet the images featured are those of blueprints, schematics, maps, communiqués, top secret

documents, graphs and the like. These “soulless” images are superimposed over one another to the tune of Gil Melle’s electronic, futuristic score, and the film’s thesis shines through. It’s the automation as art; blueprints as beauty. Lump a bunch of dot matrix images of different colors together and you have something more than a Jackson Pollock; you’ve got computer-generated, artistic composition.



Death in small-town America: A white-suited scientist surveys the devastation wrought by *The Andromeda Strain* (1971).

The film’s screenplay reflects Wise’s love of (and faith in) man’s world of technology, and is filled with more techno-jargon than an entire season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The film’s characters converse in computer-speak as though it rolls off their tongues. “Order up a 712,” Stone barks; the scientists eat “Nutrient 42-5”; and the scientists go to a “Red Kappa Phoenix Status.” These phrases are meaningless in human terms, but in the context of a world where technology and science are worshipped at the expense of humanity, they are telling. In fact, the viewer of *The Andromeda*

Strain is inundated with such talk. We hear of biological crises, odd man hypotheses, sterile conveyer systems, med-coms, nuclear magnoscanners, and the like. Though the concentration on this science-talk nicely accommodates Wise's predilection for a documentary-style approach, it is also indicative of his thesis that machines are perfect, and that man is flawed.

Many film scholars opine that *The Andromeda Strain* is actually anti-science and pro-human, and these same sources point to one piece of evidence. During the film, a piece of paper jams in a communication device and prevents the scientists from communicating with the outside world (and the military) regarding the dropping of a nuclear bomb. This "mechanical" flaw, these critics insist, reveals the fallacy of depending on technology. Yet, the scene could be read in an entirely different fashion. Had Stone been able to communicate with the military at an earlier date, he would have insisted on a 712 (the dropping of a nuclear weapon on Piedmont). This insistence would have resulted in the geometric expansion of Andromeda over the Pacific ... possibly destroying the human race in the process. The machinery—by failing at the opportune time—actually granted Stone and his team, the human component of the film, time to save the human race. So, even in malfunction, computers are worthier than man.

Indeed, all of the setbacks in *The Andromeda Strain* are the result of human failings. The computer accurately finds the component that will cause "no growth" of the deadly alien strain. This information is never found because Dr. Leavitt is an epileptic (a fact she has hidden). She goes into a trance when the computer displays the pertinent information, and her condition nearly threatens the world. Leavitt's personal failings (both the disease and the insecurity to hide it) sabotage the machinery.

Similarly many humans in the film are portrayed as hysterics or worse, cowards. Trained scientists flee in terror when they fear Andromeda has broken loose in the lab, leaving only the machinery (which closes bulkheads, vents air, et cetera) to solve the problem for them. What the film seems to be stating is that mankind may develop computers, thermographic scans, electron microscopes and the like, but the people who man these machines are inherently

flawed and prone to self-destruction. In fact, they have created an entire installation geared to self-annihilation! The lab is built around a nuclear device, for God's sake! Though man ostensibly has the final say over the detonation of this device, not technology, Hall barely makes it to the de-activation substation in time (with only seconds to spare). He is heroic, and does his job, but his success is a matter of luck and happenstance ... factors that would not affect a "perfect machine." Machines are never, if ever, at the whim of such forces.

The Andromeda Strain throws man down the ladder of superiority even further. The central bug, the alien organism, is also far more perfect than *Homo sapiens*. Andromeda can live and grow in any environment, including a vacuum. It can reproduce itself, it can adapt, and it doesn't make mistakes. Perhaps the ultimate reason that *The Andromeda Strain* deserves discussion as a horror movie is that it reveals to audiences just how fragile humans are. We could be threatened by a superior life form, and even our perfect technology cannot save us if we misapply it, or let our humanity get in the way. Some may differ with that philosophy, but its all there on-screen.

"What a world we're making. No wonder the kids are dropping out of schools," Dr. Dutton declares at one point. He is not referring to science, but to the human values that allowed the concept of germ warfare to flourish and develop in the first place. Indeed, it was the government's top-secret plan to capture the ultimate biological weapon, Andromeda, which resulted in the satellite's existence at all. Had the satellite not gone to the stars for man's dark purpose, the deadly Andromeda would never have returned to threaten the species! Again, mankind is directly responsible for its own destruction.

The Andromeda Strain works so well as an indictment of man, and as a horror film because Robert Wise is a splendid visual storyteller. Early in the film, there is a striking scene that establishes just how lethal Andromeda is. In their protective suits, Stone and Hall scan the carnage in Piedmont. These towns-people, cut down in mid-stride, are revealed to be dead in shot after disturbing shot. In fact, Wise provides a kind of rapid-fire montage of the carnage, showing

corpse after corpse in a series of split screens. The searchers are depicted on the left frame, the dead on the right, and a kind of seer/seen dynamic is established. It is a striking and horrific scene that shows, straight-faced, how a new “bug” or virus could threaten our population.

To Wise’s credit, the climax of the film is incredibly suspenseful, with Hall climbing a long ladder to reach a substation that can avert nuclear disaster. If Andromeda’s lethal nature had not been so well established, this scene would not be so powerful. As Hall climbs, mechanical obstacles in his way, the clock to destruction ticks down mercilessly. The net effect is that it is hard to sit still as the climax arrives.

It is also interesting to note that *The Andromeda Strain* is ahead of its time. During the film, Nurse Anson shows Dr. Hall how to order tests on a computer called med-com. He touches the screen with a light pen to do so. This was science fiction in 1971, but this very system was being used in major hospitals (such as Presbyterian Hospital in North Carolina) in 1996 and 1997, where it was named SIMON. In fact much of the technology predicted by this film has become standard equipment 30 years later. So not only is technology paramount in this film, it is well researched and prophetic.

Though the actors come second, after the equipment, it should also be noted in any review of *The Andromeda Strain* that Reid, Olson, Wayne and Hill give effective low key performances, augmenting the feeling that this is a documentary. Also lending a “realistic” feel to the story is Wise’s insistence on using *X-Files*-like on-screen scrawls to remind audiences where and when the action is occurring. All this groundwork provides for a sense of reality which just makes the terror that much starker. Though the film is not “pure” horror like Wise’s *The Haunting* (1960) or *Audrey Rose* (1977), it is nonetheless a smart film that understands the best way to scare an audience is to give ’em the facts.

LEGACY: A forerunner of *Outbreak* (1995), and the TV series *The Burning Zone* (1997), *The Andromeda Strain* depicts the danger of unknown micro-organisms set loose in contemporary America. Though the bug here is extra-terrestrial in nature, there are many

similarities in content between this 1970s pioneer and its 1990s brethren. Author Crichton also revised *The Andromeda Strain* in 1998, to reappear as the film *Sphere*. There, a group of scientists (with Dustin Hoffman in the Arthur Hill role) traveled deep beneath the ocean to study not an alien germ, but a spherical alien organism. That film was markedly less effective than *The Andromeda Strain*, which is probably still the best “germ” movie yet made.

***Asylum of Satan* (1971) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Charles Kissinger (Dr. Jason Specter/Martine); Carla Borelli (Lucina Martin); Nick Jolley (Chris Duncan); Louis Bandy (Lt. Tom Walshe); Claude Wayne Fulkerson (Head Aide); Jack Peterkin (Dr. Nolan); Sherry Steiner (Blind Girl); Mimi Honce (Cripple); Harry Roehrig (Mate); Pamela Gatz (the Creature); With: Don Dunkle, Gary Morris, Don Cox, Biggs Tabler, Jim Pickett, Ken Jones, Karen Stone, Joan Edwards, Liz Cherry, P.J. Childers, Beth Pearce, Nancy Marshall, Lila Baden, Lynne Kelly.

CREW: Studio I Associates Presents *Asylum of Satan*. *Story and Screenplay:* William B. Girdler, J. Patrick Kelly, III. *Director of Photography:* William L. Asman. *Produced by:* J. Patrick Kelly III. *Directed by:* William Girdler. “*The Satan Spectrum Theme*” and “*Lucina’s Theme*” *written by:* William Girdler, *arranged by:* William Girdler and Greg Walker, *and performed by:* Eddy Dee, The Blues Express. “*Red Light Lady*” *written and arranged by:* William Girdler; *sung by:* Nick Jolley. *Editor:* Gene Ruggiero. *Production Managers:* Pat Kelly, Lee Jones. *Production Secretary:* Charles Bond Pearce. *Script Clerk:* Lois Haynie. *Second Camera:* Henry B. Asman. *Sound Recorder:* Warren Maxey, Dave Portugal. *Assistant Editor:* Eva Ruggiero. *Assistant*

Director: Lee Jones. *Special Effects:* Richard Albain, Jr. *Special Make-up:* James C. Pickett. *Make-up Artist:* Glen Lawrence. *Property:* Alice Hay. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Barbara Girdler. *Technical Consultant:* Church of Satan. *Publicity Manager:* Robert E. Lee. *Titles and Opticals:* H & H Color Lab. *Sound Mixer:* MGM Studios. A Studio I Associates Presentation. *M.P.A.A Rating:* R. *Running time:* 85 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Beautiful pianist Lucina Martin awakens at Pleasant Hill Sanitarium to discover that her regular doctor has transferred her to the care of the strange and mysterious Dr. Specter. Lucina doesn't know why she is in an asylum, or why she was not informed of the transfer. However, she takes an instant dislike to Martine, Dr. Specter's harsh assistant.

When she is escorted to the cafeteria for dinner, Lucina sees that most of the other patients are garbed in white cloaks and hoods. Disturbed, she befriends three "normal" patients: a crippled woman, a blind woman, and a mute. After dinner, Lucina hears the mumblings of a mysterious satanic ritual behind a locked door.

Chris Duncan, Lucina's boyfriend, learns his lover has been transferred, and sets out to release her. He meets Dr. Specter, who tells him that Lucina has suffered a nervous breakdown and cannot receive guests. Angry, Duncan goes to the police, and returns to Pleasant Hill with Detective Walshe. Surprisingly, the asylum is abandoned, and Duncan learns it has not been occupied in years. Worse, Dr. Specter is known to be an old man in his 70s, not the vigorous, bearded fellow Duncan met earlier.

Inside the asylum, Specter kills his crippled patient by exposing her to a room of poisonous gas and deadly spiders. Then he turns his sadistic attention to the mute, and his cloaked minions burn the fellow alive. The blind patient is killed too, released into a pool filled with venomous snakes. Lucina fears she is losing her mind, but is comforted when Specter promises to release her following one special test. That special test turns out to be a satanic ritual! Lucina is strapped to an altar and surrounded by devout Satanists. Specter, who also dresses up as the nasty Martine, plans to sacrifice

Lucina, a virgin he believes, so as to attain eternal life from Lucifer.

The other sacrifices were in line with satanic rituals, and Lucina's rape by the devil will be the final act of devotion. The Devil materializes in the flesh but is most disturbed to find that Lucina ain't a virgin after all. Angry, Satan smites Dr. Specter and his hapless followers.

Chris and the police rescue Lucina after Specter has been zapped. As they leave the premises, Chris is possessed by Satan.

COMMENTARY: The most atmospheric of William Girdler's films, *Asylum of Satan* is an effective if artless low-budget horror film. Though the late Girdler usually exploited a specific film (*Grizzly* looks like *Jaws*; *Abby* resembles *The Exorcist*, et al.), the director chose a different route for his first outing. He picks up here on the budding trend of "satanic" movies that were becoming popular in the early '70s like *The Mephisto Waltz*, *Brotherhood of Satan*, *Daughters of Satan*, and the rest. That's not a bad template for Girdler to struggle with because he was actually a competent, if uninspired filmmaker, and the low-budget Satan movies of this era sometimes worked in a creepy, off-the-wall way, well outside of considerations of budget limitations. There's no real need for logic, clarity, or situational logic in Satan films: the mood of all-encompassing evil is more vital. Girdler makes the best of that niche, undone only by some weak effects and ineffective acting. In the realm of Satan movies, *Asylum of Satan* is a far better picture than *Daughters of Satan* yet not nearly as discomfiting and bizarre as *Brotherhood of Satan*.

The best portions of Girdler's premiere motion picture involve the dueling perspectives of Pleasant Hills asylum. Is it a dilapidated, destroyed edifice now exploited by Satanists, or the new, clean (but emotionally frigid) establishment perceived by Lucina? In various scenes, reality bends, and Girdler handles the transitions well. In an early scene in the sanitarium cafeteria, the camera slowly recedes to reveal a room populated with hooded, cloaked wards—silent and strange ... being served eggs (?!). That's the kind of weird touch the film strives for, and often attains. Why does the asylum shift between realities? What does it mean? Who knows, but, it's memorable, and, possibly, Girdler's attempt to dramatize visually

how a person's mental state can dictate his perception of his surroundings. Or, that reading could be giving Girdler too much credit. But, considering the quality of *Grizzly* or *Three on a Meathook* (1973), this one could have been a lot worse.

Contrarily, *Asylum of Satan* features some of the lamest visual effects imaginable ... often showcasing phoniness with an incomprehensible enthusiasm. Patently fake spiders, pulled along on obvious strings, threaten a patient, as do rubber snakes. But the *coup de grâce* is no doubt the film's depiction of Satan. The Prince of Darkness is revealed with great dramatic flair, but ends up being a stuntman in a malformed mask with ping-pong ball eyes, horns, and a smirking expression. He looks more like a Mardi Gras denizen than the Devil. Worse, when he zaps his impudent followers, it appears as though the Great Deceiver has expelled a fatal pulse of gas. Smoke wafts over his disciples, and the inescapable impression is one of a Lactose-intolerant Dark One. Of course, *Asylum of Satan* is a low budget film without the resources for high-class prosthetics or make-up, but a clever low-budget film (like *Brotherhood of Satan*) would hide Satan in shadows, cloak him in darkness, or not reveal him at all. *Asylum of Satan* is brazen in its phoniness.

Also, Girdler seems not to understand that some of the plot twists in *Asylum of Satan* are funny. That the fearsome Dr. Specter, high satanic priest, routinely doubles in drag as Martine is one of the odder story ideas to come down the pike in a while. Someone who really wants to read into the film could make the claim that Specter/Martine reflects "the doubling" schizophrenic theme of the film, also depicted in the double nature of the asylum. Again, that's probably giving this movie too much credit. The silly Specter may be one of the screen's first transvestite villains (forecasting *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*), but his predilection for women's fashion does little to enhance his menace.

The film's final twist, that Satan permits Lucina to survive because she is no longer a virgin, is another bit of unintentional humor. One can just imagine the Devil's frustration. It was probably hard to find a good virgin in the "sexual revolution" days of the early 70s.

Despite the gaffes, *Asylum of Satan* is representative of an extinct species: the independently produced, regional low-budget horror

film. Where have all the William Girdlers gone? Today, a film like this would cost 25 million dollars, star the cast of a popular WB TV series, and feature impeccable sound, editing, and special effects. It would also be boring, predictable and lacking in style. With all its flaws, *Asylum of Satan* is still fun because it represents a bold initiative. Girdler may have made bad films, but at least he did so under his own auspices, and built a career for himself doing it. Though he made terrible movies, he was an *independent* filmmaker when that concept wasn't in vogue. His films bear his personal stamp, even if that imprimatur is "cheese-wiz" all the way.

LEGACY: The low-budget *Asylum of Satan*, all but forgotten today, made enough money to assure director William Girdler a spot as a cult filmmaker. Before his untimely death in 1978, he directed *Three on a Meathook* (1973), *Abby* (1974), a low-budget *Exorcist* knock-off, *Grizzly* (1976), a low-budget *Jaws* knock-off, *Day of the Animals* (1977), and *The Manitou* (1978).

The Beast in the Cellar

Cast and Crew

CAST: Beryl Reid (Ellie Ballantyne); Flora Robson (Joyce Ballantyne); John Hamill (Alan Marlow); Tessa Wyatt (Nurse Sutherland); T. P. McKenna, David Dodimead.

CREW: *Written and Directed by:* James Kelly.
Director of Photography: Harry Waxman. *Produced by:* Graham Harris and Christopher Neame.
Executive Producer: Tony Tenser. *Music Conducted and Composed by:* Tony Macauley. *Film Editor:* Nicholas Napier-Bell. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 101 minutes.

DETAILS: A low-budget British horror film about two women who harbor a terrible monstrosity in the basement. The "beast in the cellar" escapes on a murder spree, and the two old biddies have some explaining to do. A rather bare production.

Big Foot

Cast and Crew

CAST: John Carradine (Jasper); Joi Lansing (Joi); Lindsay Crosby (Wheels); James Stellar (Big Foot); Chris Mitchum (Rick); Ken Maynard (Bennett); Tony Cardoza (Fisherman).

CREW: *Directed by:* Robert F. Slatzer. *Written by:* Robert F. Slatzer and James Gordon White. *Produced by:* Tony Cardoza. *Executive Producer:* Herman Tomlin. *Film Editor:* Hugo Grimaldi. *Music:* Richard Podalar. *Director of Photography:* Wilson Hong. From Ellman Enterprises. *M.P.A.A Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

DETAILS: In this low-budget flick, an airplane makes an unscheduled landing in the Pacific Northwest, and a woman passenger (Lansing) is subsequently captured by a monstrous creature, the Big Foot! A shop owner (Maynard), some hikers, and John Carradine attempt to rescue the damsel in distress before the missing link does something really unpleasant to the poor woman. Though shot in the late '60s, *Big Foot* was released on the unsuspecting public in 1971.

The Brotherhood of Satan (1971) * * *

Critical Reception

“...the film displays bold, direct, relatively uncomplicated acceptance of its supernature that seems the essence of fantasy moviemaking and that extends to some wonderfully spooky scenes—in a car, in a family living room—in which nothing quite happens and which are the most terrifying in *The Brotherhood of Satan*.”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, August 7, 1970.

“The whole thing has an Ed Woodsian quality of

enthusiastic incoherence that's irritating and endearing in about equal measures. Veteran character actor Strother Martin ... attacks the material with gusto."—Mike Mayo, *Videohound's Horror Show*, Visible Ink Press, 1998, page 46.

"A superb example of a small-scale horror movie that packs infinitely more punch than many other more pretentious offerings. Acting, script and direction are all uniformly good."—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 26.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Strother Martin (Doc Duncan); L.Q. Jones (Sheriff); Charles Bateman (Ben); Ahna Capri (Nicky); Charles Robinson (Priest); Alvy Moore (Tobey); Helene Winston (Dame Alice); Joyce Easton (Mildred Meadows); Debi Storm (Billie Joe); Jeff Williams (Stuart); Judy McConnell (Phyllis); Robert Ward (Mike); Geri Reischl (K.T.); Kevin McEveety, Cindy Holden, Sheila McEveety, Grant MacGregor, Brian McEveety, Alyson Moore, Debbie Judith, Scott Aguiar, Jonathan Easley, Robyn Grei, Linda Tiffany (the Children); John Barclay, Patrick Sullivan Burke, Ysabel MacCloskey, Cicily Walper, Phillis Coghlan, Anthony Jochim, Donald Journeaux, Elsie Moore, Lenore Shaenwise, Margaret Wheeler, Gertrude Graner (the Witches).

CREW: Columbia Pictures Presents *The Brotherhood of Satan*. From Four Star Excelsior Releasing Company. *Written by:* William Welch. *From a story idea by:* Sean MacGregor. *Directed by:* Bernard McEveety. An LQ JAF Presentation. *Produced by:* L.Q. Jones and Alvy Moore. *Associate Producer:* Sheila Clague. *Photographed by:* John Arthur Morrill. *Music by:* Jaime Mendoza-Nava. *Film Editor:* Marvin Walowitz. *Production Manager:* Rob Jones. *Sound Effects:* Sonic Editorial Service. *Production*

Design: Ray Boyle. *Production Mixer:* Rod Sutton.
Special Effects: Steve Karkus. *Script Supervisor:* Blair Brooks. *Titles:* Cinefx. *Technical Director:* James Bruner. *Make-up:* Lou Lane. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.
Running Time: 92 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In a small southwestern town, a normal American family attempts to escape from an unseen evil. The effort is thwarted, however, when a toy tank becomes “real” and crushes the family car ... killing all inside. As the strange incident occurs, a group of impassive children watch...

Meanwhile, Ben Holden, daughter K.T., and girlfriend Nicky are on a cross-country car trip when they are unexpectedly waylaid in the small southwestern town called Hillsboro. Though they have stopped in the tiny hamlet to report a strange car accident, the police and townspeople inexplicably mob the family. Ben and his family flee the town, stunned. A few minutes later, a child appears mysteriously on the road ahead and Ben crashes the car into a pole to avoid hitting her. Their car wrecked, the family is left with no choice but to return to Hillsboro for assistance ... despite Nicky’s misgivings about the town.

In Hillsboro, the Meadows family lives in mortal terror. The children are not allowed to play outside because of some strange danger. That night, both parents are killed by their daughter’s malevolent doll. Afterwards, the Meadows children join three others and are led away to an isolated house, the location of a demonic coven. Not long afterwards, Ben, Nicky and K.T. arrive at the Meadows home and discover the corpses of the parents. They make a report to the police, who respond quickly. The corpses are then stored in a meat locker, and Ben learns that many of the town’s dead have been stored in that manner after some kind of bizarre epidemic of violence.

Elsewhere in town, a satanic cult is being run by the town’s seemingly mild-mannered, elderly doctor. Another member of the senior citizen cult, Dame Alice, is shunned by her cohorts for supporting the baptizing of a local child. Judged guilty of treason by the Dark Lord, Alice is beaten to death by her former comrades.

Later, Ben meets with the town's sheriff, the deputy, the priest and the doctor, whose leadership role in the coven is a closely held secret. Indeed, the town authorities are all convinced that a malevolent outside force is isolating the town. Six families have been killed in 72 hours, and all the children are missing. Has something evil cordoned off the town for some terrible purpose? Later in the night, Nicky has a terrifying nightmare and she awakens convinced that the town itself is evil. The next morning, Nicky, Ben and K.T. attempt to flee in the sheriff's car but on leaving Hillsboro, the car develops a flat tire. Worse, K.T. vanishes out of the back seat and is "returned" to town ... to the coven! At the devil's lair, she is forced to attend a birthday party with the other missing children and several black-robed cultists.

Desperate, Ben and Nicky return to town to find K.T. The priest there warns that Ben's innocent child is now in the hands of the coven. The cultists apparently need K.T. for some dark purpose. In fact, it is known that there must be 13 children in the coven, and that K.T. is the twelfth missing child. The sheriff, priest, Nicky and Ben arm themselves and set out to protect a little boy named Joey, who might just be the 13th abductee for the coven. Joey's father tries to protect the boy, but is decapitated by a toy knight that has come to life. Too late to help, Nicky, Ben and the others continue their search.

Now armed with 13 children, the devil cult, led by the doctor, conducts a terrible ritual. The 13 young souls form a bridge between Earth and Hell. As the sheriff and Ben close in on the coven, the 13 children are transformed into vessels for the aging cult members. As the old cultists kill themselves, their souls pass into the helpless children. The adults of Hillsboro break in too late, and find the children all playing in seemingly innocent fashion. Unfortunately, the evil replacement has already been made.

COMMENTARY: *The Brotherhood of Satan* is an energetic small picture that grapples successfully with its frightening imagery. It is a distinctly unsettling movie that understands the core tenet of low-budget moviemaking: limitations should be adopted as strengths. Specifically, the film reveals almost nothing directly, yet nonetheless expresses a real feeling of evil in its frequent satanic

attacks. Coupled with a theme of immediate importance (children jeopardized), Bernard McEveety's film understands how scene transitions can serve as both counterpoint and connection. This intelligence in editing, framing and camera movement make for a scary and dark picture, one with an aura of terror that hangs long after the picture is over.

All towns have their secrets, and *The Brotherhood of Satan* adopts that truth as its starting point, and primary structural conceit. Strangers drive into a town where something terrible is happening, something that they do not understand and are not welcome to understand. Accordingly, McEveety's camera frequently stands back and watches many scenes through windows, holes in walls, and doorways. This continuous "looking in" on the townsfolk lands the viewer in the same situation as the "family" of travelers who have arrived and seek to understand the town's unique secret. We are voyeurs, as they are. We all look in, but do not necessarily understand what we witness inside the town's confines.

The satanic "assaults" on the residents of Hillsboro are masterpieces of visual suggestion. The poor victims actually seem to be killed by the camera, since the murders are filmed in the first-person subjective shot. Usually when the P.O.V. perspective is adopted, the viewer eventually learns who or what is doing the attacking. In *Halloween*, the punctuation of the prologue was the discovery that the killer (whose eyes the audience had gazed through) was actually a cute little boy, Michael Myers. Contrarily, in *The Brotherhood of Satan*, the camera simply closes in on victims as shadows cross their faces. Suddenly, the victims seize and die ... as if strangled by an invisible force.

The suggestion is made that the Devil worshipers are bringing toys to life (such as dolls or tanks), but because of the low budget, these items are never seen or register as ambulatory (until the end of the picture, when a toy knight on a horse becomes "real"). When a young father is murdered (ostensibly by a doll) in his living room, the camera simply approaches him ominously, he gurgles up blood and drops dead. It is as though the atmosphere has simply turned poisonous or evil, and, amazingly this technique works! The camera becomes purveyor of a dark storm cloud of terror, and it is an

unsettling and effective use of a well-worn technique. It would have been much less scary to see a fake “doll” strangle a man. That’s how the film takes its budgetary limitations as strength. It suggests instead of depicting. The audience sees the doll, understands it is controlled by a malevolent force, and then shows a bizarre attack of “atmosphere.” It is a resourceful, visually distinct solution. And, it is creepy.

The Brotherhood of Satan moves from setpiece to setpiece with a confidence and intelligence atypical in horror films of this type. After a family has been attacked, and the children stolen, the camera pans up from the scene of the crime to a wall of pictures that depict the family together in a better, more normal time. Without going into extensive dialogue about “loss” or even showing a funeral, the film establishes in one transition (from violence to fall-out) what has been lost. Later, the film cuts from an illustration in the priest’s book of devilry depicting captured children, to another photograph in the Meadows house, showing the “real” missing children. A nice connection has been forged: myth has become reality. What was imagined has become living terror.

Another expressive scene reveals a terrifying dream, Nicky trapped in an ice house with all the corpses of the town. This dream is a potent combination of disturbing images and angles as Bob, her lover, is shown to be both lover and corpse. At one point in this scene mixing sex, blood and death, Nicky sees her own dead body on an ice block. It is an unsettling image that propels the film towards its conclusion.

There is a lot to admire in *The Brotherhood of Satan*. The Satanists are all cheery senior citizens, their wrinkled faces cracked by smiles that could be interpreted as either senile or purely evil. The Satanist scenes play like cocktail parties, where nasty old folks party and discuss an agenda that just happens to involve the ritual sacrifice of children. And, the theme of a future stolen (seen also in *The Blood on Satan’s Claw*) quietly informs the film. The ineffective heroes of the picture (parents, police, doctors, and priests) are unable to stop the spiritual death of the next generation. The Satanists take the children, and the future will suffer for it. This was one of the core themes of the ’70s: that contemporary authority was so

mismanaging America's fate that the future would be one of emptiness, evil, and destruction. The film starts with murders in typical middle-class homes (representing the disintegration of the family), and then shows how various institutions (police, businesses) face the fall-out from that horror. It all works rather well, so this is a case where thoughtful direction and interesting theme combine to make something more than a standard horror film.

Brotherhood of Satan indicts our establishments (churches and families) and reveals them to be lost before a belief system of true devotion (Satanism—a bizarre inversion of Christianity as depicted here). In the end, the children are lost, and the future goes right into darkness. To reveal this spiritual emptiness, the last shot of *The Brotherhood of Satan* is a slow, long zoom into a dark black hole in a cracked wall. The viewer, who has peered in at living rooms, sheriff's offices, car interiors and the like throughout the film, is suddenly given a final glimpse at something meaningful: nothingness; the abyss. An offscreen voice welcomes evil: "Come in children," it says. Thus the vacuum, the evil, has taken the future, and the visual plunge into the crevice of blackness expresses our "falling" into a bankrupt future. If we don't welcome our children into a world where our values are strong and righteous, then they will fill the black void inside with the values of others. Values we may not agree with.

Though *Brotherhood of Satan* isn't often discussed in popular horror texts, it deserves to be. It's as smart as it is scary, and it exploits an uncertainty about the future that was so rampant in the '70s.

Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter

Cast & Crew

CAST: Horst Janson (Captain Kronos); Ian Hendry (Kerr); Caroline Munro (Carla); Wanda Ventham (Lady Durwood); Shane Briant (Durwood).

CREW: *Written, Produced and Directed by:* Brian Clemens. *Director of Photography:* Ian Wilson. *Film*

Editor: James Needs. *Music:* Laurie Johnson.
Hammer Studios. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:*
90 minutes.

DETAILS: Hammer takes a twisted new slant on vampires in the satiric *Captain Kronos*, directed by *The Avengers* creator Brian Clemens. It's silly, nasty fun, but the box office was dismal and Hammer abandoned the film's self-referential approach in subsequent horror outings. Worth a look.

Carnival of Blood (1971) *

Cast and Crew

CAST: Earle Edgerton (Tom); Judith Resnick (Laura); Martin Barolsky (Dan); Katy Mills (Fortune Teller); John Harris [Burt Young] (Gimpy); Linda Kurtz (Claire); William Grinell (Harry); Glen Kimberley (Drunken Soldier); Eve Packer (Slut); Gloria Spivak (Fat Lady).

CREW: Art Film International Presents *Carnival of Blood*. *Music:* the Brooks Group. *Electronic Music:* Hekii Brisman. *Songs sung by:* Patrice Sarnett. *Produced, written and directed by:* Leonard Kirtman. *Director of Photography:* David Howe. *Editor:* Harvey Howe. *Camerman:* Leonard Kirtman, David Howe. *Script Girl:* Deborah Howe. *Make-up:* Troy Roberts. *Set Designer:* Deborah Howe. A Kirt Film International Film Presentation. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Tom runs the balloon-popping booth at Coney Island with the help of his deformed, simpleton assistant, Gimpy. On one night, Tom and Gimpy watch with aggravation as a couple, Harry and Claire, bicker over the dart-throwing game. Tom gives Claire a prize, a teddy bear, just to be free of her incessant whining. Later that night, Claire is decapitated inside the funhouse.

Meanwhile, Laura and Dan have just become engaged. Dan has

been promoted to assistant D.A., and thinks he should investigate the murder at the nearby amusement park. Laura tells Tom, who lives in her apartment building, that she believes this to be a bad idea. Tom tells Laura she and Dan should never fight, and remembers with emotion how his parents always fought. Becoming more agreeable, Laura joins Dan at Coney Island. They follow the trail of Claire and Harry, from fortune-teller to bumper cars, to cotton candy, to Tom and Gimpy's balloon booth. Tom gives Laura a special teddy bear and reminds the couple to always get along. At the same time, a prostitute is murdered after first visiting the fortune-teller and then Tom's booth with a drunken sailor.

There is another murder the next night, following the same pattern. An aggressive, opinionated woman goes to the fortune-teller, enjoys the boardwalk, and angers Gimpy and Tom. She is punished when her eyes are plucked out. Dan drags Laura back to the amusement park, but this time they fight about it, and Laura throws away her engagement ring. While Dan questions the fortune-teller, Laura reveals to Tom that she destroyed the teddy bear he gave her in a fit of anger. Tom calls her a slut, and tells her she is just like all the other girls. He decides to kill her.

Gimpy tries to prevent Tom from hurting Laura, but Tom stabs and kills him. Dan realizes Tom is the killer and goes in search of Laura before it is too late. Tom abducts Laura, taking her first on the skyride across the park, and then on the Ferris wheel. He tries to strangle her, recalling the cruelty and infidelities of his mother, who once withheld his teddy bear from him. Before killing Laura, Tom comes to his senses, and runs off, upset. He crosses a busy road and is struck down by oncoming traffic. Dan and Laura reconcile over his corpse.

COMMENTARY: A latter day version of *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* (1966) replete with carnival setting and a prominent role for an oily fortune-teller, Leonard Kirtman's *Carnival of Blood* at least has the good sense to abandon its predecessor's fixation with musical numbers and cabaret acts. Other than that bit of good judgment, there is precious little in this film worth lauding or even noting.

The film is ostensibly about Tom, played by an actor who looks and

sounds like the living embodiment of *South Park*'s Mr. Garrison (and who even talks to a teddy bear in *voix haute*, a kind of hirsute Mr. Hat). It seems that Tom was traumatized during his youth by his parents' perpetual bickering. Now he takes his anger out on the women who frequent his boardwalk balloon attraction. Although both parents were cruel to him (denying him his precious plush bears), it is Tom's mom who bears the brunt of his blame. Thus women are Tom's victims, and what women they are!

The first female to die is Claire, a shrew of a wife who second-guesses and contradicts her (idiot) husband at every turn. To reveal Claire's nasty nature, the film show's Claire's disembodied face jabbering endlessly (sans sound) in the right corner of several shots, silently arguing over the backdrop of routine carnival footage. It is an odd, almost avante-garde moment in a film otherwise lacking in filmic style. From that high-point of the absurd, things go right down hill, and the film awkwardly cuts to a blatantly phony prosthetic head (supposed to be Claire's) as it is chopped in two with a knife.

Other women are also depicted as hateful in *Carnival of Blood*. Tom is visited at the carnival by an obnoxious, fat woman in sunglasses. She has flabby arms, sagging breasts, a huge nose, and the most grating voice imaginable. Not surprisingly, she is also killed in short (but not short enough) order, her eyes plucked out of her head. A third victim is a prostitute Tom determines is attempting to steal the cash of a drunken sailor.

In all of these negative female roles, *Carnival of Blood* seems to be defining the parameters of a bizarre social order in which women want, and demand, gift teddy bears from carnival attractions, as if a teddy bear is the most valuable status symbol imaginable in modern society. Men are judged purely on the basis of whether or not they can adequately provide the women these stuffed animals, but are otherwise held 100 percent blameless for domestic strife.

As is plain from even the most cursory viewing, *Carnival of Blood* was made cheaply, with inexperienced actors and crew, so it is not really nice to criticize the picture as unprofessional. That established, the film evidences all the problems typical of an amateur production. The camera is shaky and indeterminate, and

focus is a perpetual stumbling block—blurring and correcting, blurring and correcting, *ad nauseam*. Timing, i.e., day-night transition, is also badly mismanaged. For instance, it is already light when the prostitute is murdered under the boardwalk, but then pitch black again immediately after, when Tom and Gimpy return to Tom's apartment for a *tête-à-tête*. The pace is rather tedious too, with endless scenes of the fortune-teller haggling with customers. Repetition may equal comedy, but in horror it only equals boredom.

Perhaps *Carnival of Blood* is best remembered not for its technical gaffes, but for introducing the world to the acting stylings of Burt Young (*Rocky* [1976]). Here, Young essays the role of Gimpy, boardwalk hunchback. As this Carnie simpleton, Young often addresses the camera directly as he speaks. "You're drunk!" he accuses an off-screen customer at one point. Otherwise, Young functions adequately as a red herring, diverting audience attention away from the real killer of the piece, Mr. Garrison ... er ... Tom.

Overall, *Carnival of Blood* is a distasteful little picture about a traumatized child who grows up to be a sick, violent woman-hater. A good, suspenseful movie might have been made from such a template (witness *Psycho*!), but this film lingers on badly-realized gore at the expense of believable psychology or even horror thrills. Appropriately, the last shot of the film (after the closing credits) is of reddish paint (doubling as blood...), splattering and expanding on the ground as it turns the frame a sickly orange...

Cauldron of Blood

Cast and Crew

CAST: Boris Karloff (Badulescu); Viveca Lindfors (Tania); Jean-Piere Aumont (Marchand); Rosenda Monteros (Valerie); Milo Qeseda (Shanghai).

CREW: *Directed by:* Edward Mann. *Written by:* Edward Mann and John Nelson. *Produced by:* Robert Weinbach. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 101 minutes.

DETAILS: Made in Spain, this film's primary claim to fame is that it also purports to be the last film of its star, Boris Karloff. Sadly, Karloff looks noticeably under the weather throughout the film, and the story is little more than an excuse for a series of bloody homicides, orchestrated by Viveca Lindfors (as Karloff's wife).

***A Clockwork Orange* (1971) * * * ***

Critical Reception

"...an evil motion picture ... the way Kubrick shot and edited all this makes it obvious he is trucking to today's alienated young, and promoting the kind of nihilism that has political purposes not all of which the young perceive ... the script is adolescent maundering, and sinks to the depths of buck-chasing."—Henry Hart, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIII, Number 1, January 1972, page 51.

"...situations are eloquent and highly stylized, with great impact. Technically, the film is flawless. The lighting, editing, photography, and art direction are expert. The battle sequences ... are among the most bizarre ballets ever filmed. The film is faithful in both theme and plot to the Anthony Burgess novel of the same name ... an arresting, rattling view of the near future."—Jeff Rovin, *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction Films*, Citadel Press, 1975, page 190.

"Certainly, there are some striking images; certainly there is some impudent wit; some adroitness. But the worst flaw in the film is its air of cool intelligence and very ruthless moral inquiry because those elements are least fulfilled. Very early on, there are hints of triteness and insecurity, and before the picture is a half-hour old it begins to slip into tedium. Sharp and glittery though it continues to be, it never quite shakes that tedium."—Stanley Kauffmann, *New Republic*, January 1, 1972, page 22.

“In the end, Kubrick is having a good laugh; at the world, at liberal pretensions, at law and order, at movie audiences. All satirists laugh with anger and sadness. But most satirists try to present a norm against which the horror they see can be judged.... In *A Clockwork Orange* perhaps no norm at all (hopefully not the priest, whose speech on free will is one of the weakest parts of the film). Maybe it’s all singing in the rain. Or howling in the storm.”—Robert Philip Kolker, *Journal of Popular Film*, Volume 1, #3, Summer, 1972, page 172.

“*Clockwork* is a violent film about a violent young man. The film might well be offensive and morally repugnant if Kubrick’s skill and intelligence did not serve him so well. *Clockwork* is a moral and honest picture.”—Kenneth Von Gunden, Stuart H. Stock, *Twenty All-Time Great Science Fiction Films*, 1982, page 231.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Malcolm McDowell (Alex); Patrick Magee (Mr. Alexander); Michael Bates (Chief Guard); Warren Clarke (Dim); John Clive (Stage Actor); Adrienne Corri (Mrs. Alexander); Carl Duering (Dr. Brodsky); Paul Farrell (Tramp); Michael Gover (Prison Governor); Miriam Karlin (Catlady); James Marcus (Georgie); Aubrey Morris (Deltoid); Godfrey Quigley (Prison Chaplain); Sheila Raynor (Mum); Madge Ryan (Dr. Branom); John Savident (Conspirator Dolin); Anthony Sharp (Minister of the Interior); Philip Stone (Dad); Pauline Taylor (Conspirator Rubinstein); Steven Beroff (Constable); Lindsay Campbell (Inspector); Michael Tarn (Pete); David Prowse (Julian); Jan Adair, Vivienne Chandler, Prudence Drage (Handmaidens); John J. Carney (C.I.D. Man); Richard Connaught (Billyboy); Carol Drinkwater (Nurse Feeley); George O’Gorman (Bottick Clerk);

Cheryl Grunwald (Rape Girl); Gillian Hills (Sonietta); Craig Hunter (Dr. Friendly); Barbara Scott (Marty); Virginia Wetherell (Stage Actress); Katya Wyeth (Girl in Ascot); And: Barrie Cookson, Gaye Brown, Peter Burton, Lee Fox, Shirley Jaffe, Neil Wilson.

CREW: Warner Brothers Presents a Stanley Kubrick Production, *A Clockwork Orange*. *Produced and directed by:* Stanley Kubrick. *Screenplay by:* Stanley Kubrick. *Based on the novel by:* Anthony Burgess. *Executive Producers:* Max L. Rabb and Si Litvinoff. *Associate Producer:* Bernard Williams. *Assistant to the Producer:* Jan Harlan. *Production Designer:* John Barry. *Electronic Music composed and realized by:* Walter Carlos. *Film Editor:* Bill Butler. *Sound Editor:* Brian Blamey. *Sound Recordist:* John Jordan. *Dubbing Mixers:* Bill Rowe, Eddie Haben. *Art Directors:* Russell Hagg, Peter Shields. *Special Paintings and Sculpture:* Herman Makkink, Cornelius Makkink, Liz Moore, Christiane Kubrick. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Ron Beck. *Costume Designer:* Milena Canonero. *Stunt Arranger:* Roy Scammell. *Casting:* Jimmy Liggat. *Location Manager:* Terry Clegg. *Assistant Directors:* Derek Cracknell, Dusty Symonds. *Construction Manager:* Bill Welch. *Property Master:* Frank Bruton. *Assistant Editors:* Gary Shepherd, Peter Burgess, David Beesley. *Make-up:* Fred Williamson, George Partleton, Barbara Daly. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* X. *Running time:* 137 minutes.

P.O.V.

“I could see very serious social unrest in the U.S. that would probably be resolved by a very authoritative government.... And then you could only hope you would have a benevolent despot rather than an evil one. A Tito rather than Stalin—though of the Right”⁵.—Director Stanley Kubrick, on the political environment that led to his

cautionary tale of freedom-lost, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

SYNOPSIS: In the not-so-distant future, society at large has become a more violent, brutal place. In this cold, lawless world, youngster Alex and his three “droogs” (Pete, Georgie and Dim) spend their evenings at the Korova Milk Bar drinking milk laced with drugs, a beverage that helps them work up an appetite for a little of the “ultra-violence” they enjoy so much. After a night of drinks, they beat up an old homeless man, then catch up with a rival gang of droogs, led by Billy Bob, and fight it out. As the police arrive, Alex and his cohorts flee to the country. They stop at a random residence, the home of writer Mr. Alexander. They worm their way into the home by claiming there has been an accident on the road. Once inside, however, Alex and his friends beat Mr. Alexander and rape his wife. To close out the fun-filled night, Alex and his droogs return to the milk bar and listen to a “sophisto” sing from Alex’s favorite musical artist, Beethoven. The other droogs are bored by the performance, but Alex silences them with brute force.

As the morning comes, Alex returns to his home in Municipal Flatblock A, where he lives with his mother and father. He sleeps off the night after checking in with his pet snake, and masturbating to more Beethoven. The next day, he misses school and his guidance counselor comes to his house to warn he is just a step away from incarceration. The counselor leaves the premises after a half-hearted attempt to molest Alex. Later, Alex goes to a nearby mall, picks up two lovely girls, and brings them back to his room for a threesome.



Just singing in the rain! Kubrick (right) directs Malcolm McDowell (center) and Adrienne Corri (left) during a “little ultra-violence” from *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

By night, Alex’s droogs gather and question his authority. Alex doesn’t appreciate this, and puts down the challenge to his authority by throwing Georgie into a river and slicing open Dim’s hand with a knife. Again, brute force wins the day, and Alex’s leadership is re-established. He suggests they head next to Woodmere Health Farm for a little fun, and he proceeds to break in and brutally attack a woman (with a giant sculpture of a penis!). Unfortunately, this woman (an owner of many cats), has called the police, and Alex is incapacitated by his vengeful droogs and then apprehended by the authorities. After a brief trial, Alex is sentenced to fourteen years in prison for the murder of the cat lady.

In prison, Alex is assigned to help a priest conduct Sunday services. He is a model prisoner until he hears of a new treatment that could get him released from prison quickly. Alex is promptly selected for the Ludovico treatment and transferred to a clinic. Under the

supervision of a new “hard on crime” minister of interior, Alex’s treatment begins. He is taken to a screening room and placed in eyelid-locks that force his eyes open as he watches violent film after violent film. In conjunction with these images of brutality, Alex has been given a nausea-provoking drug. Together, the drug and the images form a connection in his mind, and he grows sick, unable to stomach violence ... or even sex. Unfortunately, Alex is also (inadvertently) conditioned to get sick whenever he hears Beethoven ... his favorite composer!

After the treatment is complete, Alex is shown off to the government. He cannot fight, have sex, or even tolerate violent thoughts without growing physically ill, thus he is of no harm to society. A priest warns that Alex’s humanity, his choice to do good or evil, has been taken away, but the government’s response is that Alex is a “true Christian,” finally capable of turning the other cheek.

Alex is released from prison and sent home. In his absence, his parents have rented out his room to a lodger and killed his pet snake. Ashen, Alex leaves home and is promptly beaten by the homeless men he once terrorized. Then he runs into George and Dim, now police officers! They beat him up and attempt to drown him. Bloodied and weak, Alex finds himself back at the home of Mr. Alexander, whose wife he raped. Mr. Alexander recognizes Alex and subjects him to Beethoven’s *9th Symphony*. Driven mad by the nausea-provoking music, Alex attempts to kill himself. He jumps out a window ... but survives.

Some time later, Alex awakens from a coma and learns he is a media celebrity, and that his so-called cure is the cause of controversy. He is nursed back to health, and even visited by the minister of the interior, who wants to be his friend. Alex is offered a job and a good salary in compensation for all he has suffered, and, best of all, he is cured of the Ludovico treatment...

COMMENTARY: In 1971, Stanley Kubrick’s visual imagining of a future world dominated by sex, violence and corrupt bureaucracies was considered a far-fetched, even offensive, glimpse of a not-necessarily probable future world. However, by the year 2002, much of Kubrick’s bleak vision had come to pass. We live in a media-saturated world where children are learning earlier than ever

before about sex; there are violent outbreaks in schools; and political elections are bought and sold by corrupt special interests. Accordingly, the film's message is clearer than ever. Even in an age of excess, the citizen's right to choose right or wrong must never be corrupted ... even if the choice is a morally degenerate one. In a free society, *A Clockwork Orange* seems to tell us, we must tolerate monsters like Alex (Malcolm McDowell) to ensure that the rest of us all retain our freedom.

It's both frightening and amazing to study the myriad places where Burgess's and Kubrick's film accurately predict (with some exaggeration), how a future world might look and feel. In today's reality, the world "sexualizes" young girls such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera (even as American girls reach puberty at a younger age than ever in history), and the media worships the hard-bodies of the international super models. In *A Clockwork Orange*, sex is likewise merchandised and sold. It has become as prevalent and generic as a Ronald McDonald sculpture at a fast food restaurant. To wit, at various bars, milk is dispensed through statuettes of naked women. Pull the lever, and out of the mechanical breasts pour a beverage. Nudity serves every consumer, and is no longer reserved for privacy, art or the like.

Men too are sexual objects in *A Clockwork Orange*, wearing enlarged codpieces as a sexual affectation. This latter image is not all that different from body piercings, tattoos or any other fad that now distinguishes those who wish to be seen as trendy and sexually desirable. Cleverly, *A Clockwork Orange* notes that the rampant sexuality is not so much a result of changing (or degenerating) morals as it is a reflection of an irresponsible media, where everyone and everything is viewed primarily as a commodity. One important scene in the film takes Alex to a futuristic mall filled wall to wall with magazines, music recordings (where we see the soundtrack to *2001: A Space Odyssey*), and a bevy of teenagers. This world of commerce is also the place where teens gather and meet, usually to have sex afterwards. It is all part and parcel of the consumer culture. Sex is on display right there with the CDs.

Yet *A Clockwork Orange* is most often noted for its themes about violence, not sex. That is appropriate too, since the film is rather

brutal (meriting an X-rating when it was released in 1971). However, violence has progressed in film so far since *A Clockwork Orange* that Kubrick's movie seems almost quaint today. The oddball costume affectations immediately take the film out of the realm of pure realism into a land that, if no doubt plausible, also has a bit of make believe to it. Similarly, the rapes and beatings are orchestrated to classical or pop music (like "Singin' in the Rain"), which tends, again, to lift the film out of gritty reality into near-satire. A scene in which four droogs rape a helpless naked woman, and then are beaten down by Alex and his gang, becomes a ballet of violence, as beautiful and funny as it is disturbing. The blunt-faced rape scene involving Adrienne Corri and "Singin' in the Rain" is more harrowing, but Kubrick again distances the audience from the real horror by utilizing a familiar melody for purposes of irony. The audience is thus invited to retreat from the violence (to laugh with recognition as it were), instead of face the brutal rape with no escape. "Singin' in the Rain," a song of unadulterated joy, is forever linked to Gene Kelly's sure-footed dance of delight. Here, it is re-framed in a new context. To Alex, his joy involves beating others, and his foot delivers kicks, crushes and stomps rather than dance moves. The ironic use of music is entertaining, but it is also a ploy to appeal to the intellectual curiosity of the viewer. An audience member is not so tormented or disturbed by the break-in and ensuing violence when his brain is caught up acknowledging the irony of Kubrick's musical choice, cataloguing a reference to a musical classic.

The most disturbing facet of *A Clockwork Orange* is not actually the bald-faced violence, but the endemic cruelty of spirit that passes for the norm in Alex's world. His parents are cold, pitiable things with no real warmth or decency. They are objects to laugh at in their mod clothes, eliciting no respect whatsoever. The priest, who insists that Alex must have the right to make his own moral choices, is a naïve dupe. He believes (wrongly) that Alex has a "genuine desire to reform," blissfully unaware that the boy is actually a monster. Politicians use any advantage, even rampant crime, to advance their position. Policemen—former droogs!—are corrupt, and even doctors and nurses are depicted in negative terms, more interested in sexual dalliances than in helping their wards, the sick and dying. No authority comes out of this film unscathed. Even those people

audiences would be inclined to sympathize with, particularly the victims of violent crime, are shown to be obsessed with revenge. *A Clockwork Orange* is perceived as such a cold film not because of its violence, but because it clinically views man as an essentially cruel creature. There are few redeeming features to any character in the film.

And that brings us to Alex. Many critics were outraged with Kubrick because they feel his film actually engenders sympathy for Alex, a boy of violent impulses and immorality. There is a point there. In comparison with the brutal policemen, the self-obsessed bureaucrats, the other droog thugs (who don't even appreciate good music), and the empty-headed parents, Alex is the most identifiably human character in the film. He's a horrible person, no doubt, but at least we are privy to his thoughts. Even if those thoughts are brutal (and they are!), that identification humanizes the boy. He may be violent, but he loves Beethoven. He may treat his parents badly, but we see upon his release how deeply they wound him by disowning him. Though Alex is a victimizer, the film takes special pains to prove that he is likewise a victim. The overall picture of Alex is one of a boy who, in the absence of his parents, was raised by the violence and sex obsessed media. Is it any wonder then, that he is the way he is? A person must take some responsibility for his own actions, but just look at Alex's world. Even his guidance counselor is despicable; a pedophile! In such a world, Alex seems less culpable, less vile. He is a product of his environment, no more, no less.

So what is Kubrick's point? Why create a world of such horrors? The ultimate question of *A Clockwork Orange* involves choice. For whatever reason, this world of violence and immorality has been created by human choices. The politicians perpetuate it; parents permit it; Alex thrives in it. The film, however, never focuses on the dismantling of such a dystopia. Instead, it says that the world may degenerate, but humans must forever retain the right to make their own world—even if it's awful—or they won't be human anymore. For all his flaws, Alex has free will, an essential of the human condition, and as soon as that inalienable human right is taken away from him, he is nothing but an animal.

It seems then that, in one sense or another, Kubrick was predicting the rise of the PC and religious police, those self-appointed guardians of morality (such as the highly partisan William Bennett) who seek to steal choices away from others for the perceived greater good. It is bad and unhealthy to smoke, so now there are laws against smoking in public forums. There is moral decay in America, so students should be forced to pray in public classrooms, and courtrooms should display the Ten Commandments on the wall. Students should know how to read, so they will be given uniform standards and tested by our schools, *ad nauseam*, until the only thing anyone is learning is how to pass the test. All these acts attempt to take the freedom of choice away from the individual and put it in the hands of the bureaucrats, the priests, the police, the judges, and other authorities that Kubrick so evidently despised. As soon as these forces decide what is good for us, and force their choices on us, we lose our prerogatives as free, thinking human beings. We're just cattle.

And that is why Alex is nothing less than the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*. He is a violent, immoral monster, but he survives society's attempt to take away his individuality. He is not violent or immoral for the greater good, only for his own pleasures and selfish ends, but ... *and here's the rub* ... that's his choice. The question is, do we honor that choice, or seek to repress it? And if we forbid some acts, who is to say what will be forbidden next?

Crucible of Horror (1971) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Yvonne Mitchell (Edith Eastwood); Michael Gough (Walter Eastwood); Olaf Pooley (Reid); Simon Gough (Rupert Eastwood); Sharon Gurney (Jane Eastwood); David Butler (Gregson); Nicholas Jones (Benji); Mary Hignett (Servant); Howard Goorney (Petrol Pump Attendant); Sam the Dog (Sam).

CREW: A Cannon Group, Inc, London-Cannon Film.
Executive Producers: Dennis Friedland, Christopher

Dewey. *Music composed and conducted by:* John Hotchkis. *Photography:* John Mackey. *Original screenplay by:* Olaf Pooley. *Directed by:* Viktor Ritelis. *Produced by:* Gabrielle Beaumont. *Editor:* Nicholas Pollock. *Dubbing Editor:* Max Bell. *Production Manager:* Michael Brown. *Art Director:* Peter Hampton. *Camera Operator:* Alan Tavener. *Second Cameraman:* Clive Tiekner. *First Assistant:* Colin Lloyd. *Sound Mixer:* Aubrey Lewis. *Gaffer:* Taffy Elkins. *Hairdresser:* Betty Glasgow. *Make-up:* Fred Willimson. *Wardrobe:* Mary Gibson. *Production Assistant:* Janet Elliott. *Titles and Opticals:* Abacus. Made on location and at Merton Park Studios with the cooperation of Abacus Productions Ltd. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 91 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: It is an existence of domestic torture for Jane and her mother, Edith Eastwood. Along with Jane's simpering sibling, Rupert, the Eastwood family lives under the thumb of the tyrannical, obsessive-compulsive Walter. Edith has resorted to the world of art, painting terrifying pictures of her boorish husband. Jane has rebelled in another way, stealing money and trying to hook up with boys behind her father's back.

One night during an interminable dinner, Mr. Gregson from the golf club arrives and informs Walter that Jane has stolen a considerable amount of cash from the club safe. Walter pays Gregson back and later beats Jane with a riding whip. As Jane is brutally abused, her brother and mother do nothing to stop the violence.

Seeing Jane's blood and bruises, Edith suggests the next day that she and Jane kill Walter once and for all. When Walter goes down to the cottage for the weekend, Jane and Edith decide to follow him, and do the deed. They steal one of his many hunting rifles, and confront him. Then, they force him to drink poison and liquor so it looks like he committed suicide. When the terrible Walter is finally unconscious, Edith and Jane carry him to the upstairs bedroom and undress him. There, they think they leave behind a corpse. Unseen by the culprits, Walter opens his eyes...

Jane and Edith return home and await the call announcing that

Walter has been found dead at the cottage. The call doesn't come. Not that night, nor the next day. Finally, a worried Rupert telephones to say he has not heard from Walter. He tells Jane to drive to the cottage and check up on things. Jane and Edith go, reluctantly, and find the entire house spotlessly cleaned. But there is no sign of Walter's body! Outside the cabin, they find his corpse in a large crate. Before they can get rid of the evidence, a neighbor, Reid, shows up and starts to ask questions about Walter's whereabouts. His dog sniffs around at the crate, but doesn't find the corpse. After Reid has left, Jane and Edith heave the crate into the trunk of their car, drive to a dump, and throw the incriminating evidence over a hill.

Shaken, Jane and Edith return home. They hear a noise: someone has broken a window in their living room! Fearful, Jane and Edith wonder who might be playing tricks on them. Rupert telephones them, but the line goes dead. That night, Edith has a dream that something evil awaits in the attic. She awakens and checks the attic out, only to discover Walter, hanging upside down in the doorway. Edith flees in terror, and a very much alive Walter pursues her.

Later, Jane and Edith are forced to endure the same Hell as before. Walter is back, alive and well, treating them like non-persons. In fact, Edith feels so invisible, she just fades away at the dinner table...

COMMENTARY: Sometimes, one character and one performance can make a movie memorable. Consider Hannibal Lecter (and Anthony Hopkins), in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). *Crucible of Horror* doesn't quite offer anything so iconic in terms of the horror genre, but it comes close. In particular, Michael Gough (*The Boys from Brazil* [1978], *Serpent and the Rainbow* [1987], *Batman and Robin* [1997]) masterfully creates an absolutely intolerable fellow named Walter Eastwood. This character is obsessive-compulsive (we see him ritualistically cleaning his hands...), physically abusive (he beats his daughter...), a control freak (he also reads her mail...), haughty, and awfully fun to hate. In fact, much of *Crucible of Horror's* considerable suspense comes from the fact that the audience hates Walter so much, and invests so much interest in seeing his demise orchestrated. Really, the picture serves little other

purpose than that; it's a peek at a dysfunctional family that has become so broken that murder remains the only option for improving home life.

Ritelis is a capable director, and he has found good material and good performers to match his talents here. The film opens with some elaborate crosscutting between Jane's latest rebellion, and Walter's icy, silent stewing. The audience doesn't know what is going to happen with either character at this juncture, but a sense of discomfort and anticipation is forged as each character toils to opposite ends. Later in the film, the crosscutting technique recurs when Walter strikes Jane with a riding whip. This bit of brutality is intercut with shots of Jane's brother, Rupert, as he dons his headphones and conducts an invisible orchestra, alone in his own make-believe world. The crosscutting indicates Rupert's silent culpability in the domestic abuse. For letting it happen to Jane without struggle, he is just as guilty of the crime as his brutal father. The similarity in hand gestures (Walter striking Jane with the riding crop; Rupert waving in time to the music) forges a visual link, a bridge, between the acts. What it suggests is that Rupert's act is no less troublesome than Walter's, for he shuts himself off and enables the abuse to occur.

Crucible of Horror speaks the same language as *Straw Dogs* (1971), obsessing on matters of abuse, rape and violence—all of which are shown in disturbing flashes. But, Ritelis's primary focus is not on man's nature (as is Peckinpah's), but of a family's. Jane and Edith are desperate to find a way out of their domestic hell, and are surrounded by traitors (Rupert), and monsters (Walter). Does that give them the right to commit murder? Can it ever truly be declared that somebody deserves to die, let alone somebody who is part of our trusted inner circle? The reason Edith and Jane don't simply leave the abusive Eastwood household is that they want Walter's money ... they can't survive without it. So they are less than noble people, themselves. Why do some spouses stay? Why do some kill? *Crucible of Horror* offers some interesting thoughts on such dysfunction, and it meditates on them within a suspenseful framework.

Though there is nary a vampire or werewolf in sight, *Crucible of*

Horror is nonetheless a horror film because it invites the audience to watch a family's disintegration close up. Mother becomes unhinged, conversing with her bizarre art, and might as well be insane. Walter stalks his house and dominates everybody, a real-life monster in his modern-day castle. Rupert is locked away in his own world of imagination, and Jane's criminal acts are cries for attention. It's dysfunction junction, and part of the film's fun is in seeing how we (as viewers of dozens of similar movies) are smarter than these schemers when it comes to plotting the perfect crime.

Crucible of Horror earns its three stars mostly in its climactic moment, which finds a perfect visual metaphor for the quiet suffering that so many spouses endure in bad domestic situations. There is a family meal in the dining room, another interminable affair over which Walter arrogantly presides, and, without warning, Edith just fades away. Nothing has changed, nothing will change, and Ritelis visually suggests that Edith might as well be a ghost for all her importance to Walter and his domain. She literally disappears to nothing, no longer of value or concern. It's a daring final shot that uses a special effect (a fade-out style disappearance) not for supernatural ends, but for poetic, metaphorical ones. Inside, no doubt Edith faded away long ago. The last sequence of the film carries that process through to its logical, physical conclusion. She has shrunk to nothing before the domineering husband who fails to value her. Sadly, many spouses could probably relate to her plight.

As the vicious, officious Walter Eastwood, Gough has found a great role. Gough is a cold actor, and his face, so harsh and lined, is perfect for the part. Walter is every bit the monster that Dracula or the Wolfman is, but ever so much more frightening because he exists in our everyday reality. We don't need to make him up...

***Crucible of Terror* (1971) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Mike Raven (Victor); Mary Maude (Millie);
James Bolam (John); Ronald Lacey (Michael);
Melissa Stribling (Joanna); John Arnatt (Bill); Betty

Alberge (Dorothy); Judy Matheson (Marcia); Beth Morris (Jane); Kenneth Keeling (George); Me Me Lay (Chi San).

CREW: A Peter Newbrook Production. *Director of Photography:* Peter Newbrook. *Production Executive:* John Brittany. *Art Director:* Arnold Chapkis. *Assistant Director:* Roger Simons. *Production Manager:* Ted Sturgis. *Camera Operator:* Kelvin Pike. *Make-up:* Jimmy Evan. *Hairstylist:* Jan Dorman. *Wardrobe:* May Gibson. *Continuity:* Ann Edwards. *Editor:* Maxine Julius. *Sound Editor:* Colin Hobson. *Assistant Editor:* Tariq Anwar. *Recorder:* Ken Ritchie. *Re-recording:* Nolan Roberts. *Dubbing Mixer:* Bob Jones. *Music:* Paris Rutherford. *Original Screenplay:* Ted Hooker, Tom Parkinson. *Executive Producer:* Peter Newbrook. *Producer:* Tom Parkinson. *Directed by:* Ted Hooker. Made at Shepperton Studios, London, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A reclusive artist named Victor Clare premieres his latest body sculptures in a posh London art gallery. His most popular piece is a lead cast of a beautiful nude woman. But unknown to the patrons of the gallery, a real-life woman is dead inside the work of art.

The gallery wants more pieces from Victor Clare, but his son, the drunk Michael, is unwilling to smuggle out any more works because his father is a violent man. By night, a patron, George Brent, attempts to steal the already purchased sculpture, and is strangled in plastic by an unseen assailant.

The next day, John (the gallery curator) joins friends Michael, Jane and Millie for a trip to remote Jericho to meet Victor. There they are introduced to Michael's timid, not-quite-sane mother, and Victor's former-military buddy, Bill. They also meet Victor's new model, Marcia, with whom he is shacking up. Before long, Victor has asked Millie, John's wife, to model for him. She is creeped-out by Victor and unwilling to do so. Worse, when she dons an Asian kimono she purchased at a London bazaar, she has bizarre

memories of a blood ritual involving a masked man, a sword, and a bucket of spilled blood. Despite Millie's reluctance to pose for him, Victor insists that Millie captures a unique beauty ... a beauty he has only seen once before.

While John returns to London to get the cash necessary to buy more pieces from Victor, the murderer strikes again, killing Michael on the beach. Millie's visions grow worse, especially when she meets with Bill, the military man and collector of Oriental artifacts. The sword she saw in her dream is hanging on his wall. While taking a walk on the beach, Millie is pursued by Victor to an old cave leading to a mine. Inside the mine, Millie runs into Victor's wife, who escorts her through a secret tunnel back to the safety of the lead furnace.

Growing impatient, Victor fires up the furnace, desiring to capture Millie's beauty in bronze forever. Meanwhile, John raises the money in London to buy more of Victor's "art," but his car breaks down on the return trip. When Marcia is murdered and Bill goes to fetch John, Millie is left to deal with Victor and his amorous needs. Millie ends up at the furnace, Victor's would-be victim, but strangely, a spirit enters her body and she kills Victor with Bill's Oriental sword before he can commit another murder. It seems that every time Millie wore her "cursed" kimono—belonging to one of Victor's previous victims—she channeled the spirit of a vengeful Asian girl who died for Victor's art.

COMMENTARY: What a wacky movie! *Crucible of Terror* is a modern day variant on *House of Wax*, with corpses providing the foundation for so-called works of art. Call it *Portrait of the Artist as a Psycho*. Though the film has a textbook horror movie set-up, and some not totally ineffective sequences, it is a badly jumbled mélange of elements that ultimately fail to cohere.

Crucible of Terror (not to be confused with the far superior *Crucible of Horror*) is one of those films that offer a good story, but a terrible script. Specifically, the setting and situations are filled with potential. There's a psychopath (identity indeterminate but suspected), a remote setting (complete with local superstitions and disturbing history), and a fresh supply of victims (including a beautiful blond). There's even a little hint of lesbianism thrown in

for fun. Great horror movies have been made with lesser set-ups, no doubt.

But, sadly, the screenplay of *Crucible of Terror* is oddly vague. It sets up so many red herrings that it grows obvious by mid-movie that any one of them could legitimately be the killer. The military man, Bill, loves Victor's wife, and would do anything to protect her. He could be the killer. Victor's wife is a total psycho (she brings a toy stuffed dog to the dinner table and then spoon feeds it!). She too, could very well be a murderer. Victor, of course, is the obvious choice, since he is the philandering, obsessed artist. But then there is also Michael, his money-hungry son, and Victor's former mistress, now disenfranchised. With the stroke of a pen, any of these characters could have been the film's angel of death. Not unexpectedly, the movie is filled with ridiculous red-herring lines of dialogue like "Up to your old tricks again?" all of which indicate dark secrets and histories. Yet, when the conclusion finally comes, none of these characters is the antagonist! Instead, the murders were carried out by the protagonist, who because of a haunted kimono (!?), was possessed by the spirit of a wronged model.

Not only is this resolution bizarre, it is out of left field. The film never suggests or even intimates that this is a world where the supernatural has presence, and then the film closes with ... *surprise!* ... the supernatural. It's a cop-out ending, and it leads one to realize that all the characters have been designed to be suspicious when in fact none of them are guilty.

"Great art demands great sacrifice," Victor notes in *Crucible of Terror*, and that would also suffice as a word of advice to director Ted Hooker. His film features lovely girls, pretty locations, an interesting enough story to keep it afloat, but a lazy, *deus ex machina* climax and a script that can only euphemistically be called banal. By the end of it all, even Hooker seems to know he's lost. Vanquished by his netherworldly opponent, Victor falls to his death, and Hooker's camera doesn't quite catch the pertinent action. Then, an awkward exposition scene follows suddenly, explaining what happened in basic, didactic terms ... since the film's resolution is by no means clear to confused viewers who have been trying to keep track of the victims, the suspects, and their whereabouts at the time

of various crimes.

If the rest of *Crucible of Terror* is just mediocre, then the end is downright messy. It's one of those rare, promising films that throw everything away at the climax, prompting audience hoots and hollers of derision. *Boo!*

***Daughters of Darkness* (1971) * * * 1/2**

Critical Reception

"Kumel gets a lot of mileage out of only four significant characters.... The movie's effect is hypnotic and dreamlike...."—Michael Gingold, *Fangoria* #172, May 1998, page 77.

"While there is blood and gore, Kumel explores the dark side of human sexuality in fascinating fashion, using erotica and symbolism. Achieves an aura of decadence strangely compelling."—John Stanley, *Creature Features Strikes Again*, page 95, 1994.

Cast & Crew

CAST: John Karlen (Stefan); Delphine Syrig (Countess Elizabeth Battori); Danielle Ouimet (Valerie); With: Andrea Rau, Paul Esser, Georges Jamin, Jaris Collet, Fons Rademakers.

CREW: Showking Films and Maya Films present a Belgian-French-German co-production. Showking films (Brussels); Maya Films (Paris); Roxy Film (Munich); and Vog Films (Brussels). *Director of Photography:* Eduard van der Enden. *Music composed and conducted by:* François de Roubaix. *Screenplay:* Pierie Drouot, Jean Ferry, Harry Kumel. *In association with:* Joe Amiel. *Produced by:* Henry Lange, Paul Collet. *Associate Producer:* Alain C. Guillaume, Pierre Drouot. *Directed by:* Harry Kumel. *Executive Producer:* Alain-Claude

Guillaume. *Production Managers*: Erwin Gitt, Jean-Marie Bertrand. *Location Manager*: Paul Collet. *Property Master*: Willy Dellaert. *Miss Seyrig's Gown*: Bernard Perris. *Miss Ouimet's Wardrobe*: Cinelle, Malborough van Gelder. *Miss Seyrig's Hairstyle*: Alexandre. *Furs by*: Denoit. *Shoes by*: Lautrec. *Make-up*: Ulli Ullrich. *Make-up Assistant*: Pascale Kellen. *Wardrobe supervisor*: Marie-Paule Petignot. *Sound Mixer*: Jacques Eippers. *Boom swinger*: Henri Morelle. *Sound effects*: Hans W. Kramski. *Art Director*: François Hardy. *Set Dresser*: Henri Roesems. *First Camera Assistant*: Peter Anger. *Second Camera Assistant*: Jacques Fondaire. *First Assistant Director*: Paul Arias. *Second Assistant Director*: Jean-Marc Turine. *Continuity*: Magda Reypens. *Editing*: Gustav Schueren, Denis Bonan. *Assistant Editor*: Daniel Devalle, Edith Shumann. *Special Effects*: Eugene Hendrickx, Thierry Hallard. *Lighting Equipment*: locaflash. *Laboratories*: Meuter-Titra Brussels L.T.C. Shot on location in Ostend, Brussels. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: NR *Running time*: 100 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A newlywed couple, Stefan and Valerie, make passionate love on a train returning from Sweden. Afterwards, Valerie is afraid Stefan's mother will not approve of her, and Stefan suggests a hotel stay for a time, so he can call his mother and tell her news of the marriage. They arrive at a grand old hotel and learn that they are the only guests there but for two glamorous women: Countess Elizabeth Battori and her traveling companion, a dark beauty. The hotel clerk is baffled by Battori's appearance because she closely resembles a woman who visited the hotel when he was but a busboy some thirty years earlier ... and she hasn't aged a day.

Stefan and Valerie stay in an adjoining suite to the new arrivals, and are fascinated to learn of several local crimes. Four girls have been found dead in town. Valerie is concerned because Stefan seems fascinated by the deaths, and his sexual appetites are become increasingly violent. After a day on the town, Stefan and Valerie are followed by a suspicious policeman, who wonders if they know something of the deaths.

Elizabeth and her companion make their move that evening, sharing drinks with Stefan and Valerie in the hotel lounge. Elizabeth tells the story of the “Scarlett Countess,” a sadistic woman who drank the blood of hundreds of virgins to stay young. She chained them for their blood, bathed in it, clipped off their fingers, cut off their nipples with silver pincers, slit their throats, cut their veins with rusted nails, and performed other assorted atrocities. As Elizabeth speaks of these things, Stefan finds himself turned on by the images. Valerie is horrified by the morbid discussion, and excuses herself for the evening. In the hotel room, she is terrified that a shadowy figure is watching her from the ledge.

When Stefan beats Valerie with a belt preceding lovemaking, Valerie decides it is time to leave her husband. She packs her bags and leaves for the train, but is intercepted by Elizabeth at the station. Meanwhile, Stefan and Elizabeth’s traveling companion make passionate love. Stefan and Valerie are unaware, at this point, that both strange women are actually vampires. Batori is the Scarlet Countess herself, and the other woman is one of her lovers.

Stefan inadvertently kills Elizabeth’s companion when he forces her into the running water of the shower (a death sentence for vampires...). Just as Stefan kills the woman, Elizabeth and Valerie return to the hotel. Though angered by Stefan’s betrayal, Valerie helps Elizabeth and Stefan get rid of the body. Not far away, the police officer watches in secret.

As the night passes, Elizabeth seduces Valerie, transforming her into a new love slave/vampire companion. Stefan is now convinced that Elizabeth is evil, and begs Valerie to leave the hotel with him. Valerie is under Elizabeth’s spell, and can do nothing but obey her master. Stefan and Elizabeth fight for possession of Valerie, and Stefan loses. He ends up as dinner for the two vampires, who drink hungrily from his bloody wrists.

Together, Elizabeth and Valerie hide Stefan’s body, steal a car, and strike the suspicious police officer as he rides his bicycle on the road ahead of them. Unfortunately, daylight is coming, and Elizabeth will die if exposed. Valerie starts to speed, but as sunlight looms, loses control of the vehicle. The car spins and turns over, and Elizabeth is thrown from the burning vehicle and impaled on a

tree.

A few months later, Valerie has adopted Elizabeth's decadent lifestyle (and voice), and leads another married couple down the path of temptation and ruin...

COMMENTARY: Harry Kumel's *Daughters of Darkness* is a kinky, erotic horror film, the genre equivalent of *9½ Weeks*, only smarter, more honest, and more provocative. The film artfully employs color and light to contrast the vampires (red) with the humans, Stefan and Valerie (blue). More importantly, the film makes some insightful connections between vampirism and the dark sexual appetites of its protagonists. Indeed, in *Daughters of Darkness*, vampirism seems just another avenue to sexual arousal, to sexual awakening. Countess Battori is merely a catalyst who opens up Stefan and Valerie to a dark sexual "experiment."

Daughters of Darkness commences with an explicit sexual coupling between Stefan and Valerie, bathed in a cool, azure light. There are close-ups and full shots of the nude couple, but the light suggests coolness, not passion. Blue is the color of ice, the color of cold, on film, and Kumel's choice reveals to the audience something about these characters. Though they are married, though they may be in love, their passion is such that it can only be described as restrained, courtesy of the sapphire lighting. When Countess Elizabeth Battori and her lover are seen, they recline in a hot red light, a remarkable contrast to the blue. Red represents fire, heat, and passion on film, so Kumel's choice of lighting is again revelatory: since Battori and her mistress openly express their desires (vampirism, homosexuality), they are seen in shades of scarlet. Not incidentally, crimson is also the color of blood, and the intimation seems to be that Stefan and Valerie's blood may run cold (blue), but Battori's is hot, burning, red.

This lighting concept, though simple, is consistent throughout the picture. Later in the film, Stefan and Valerie again make love, and again, they are seen in pale shades of blue. As the vampires watch the encounter from the ledge outside their room, the light shifts to red. Even by satisfying their desire to be voyeurs, to watch, then, the vampires are expressing their passion, and thus depicted in tones of red. Kumel adapts this tack later, too. After Stefan first

expresses his repressed desire, to whip Valerie with a belt, the lighting turns to a golden yellow; not quite as hot as red, or as cold as blue, but somewhere between. The inference is that Stefan is changing, influenced perhaps by the red hue, the overt passion, of the vampires he has gotten to know.

Of course, lighting cues that indicate character temperament or desire would mean little in any film if the images did not reinforce the story and themes of the picture. Fortunately, *Daughters of Darkness* has a well-developed screenplay. It depicts a marriage that goes sour faster than Darva Conger's, as Stefan and Valerie are psychologically separated by both their secret (and kinky) desires, and by the manipulative Battori. When Battori tells the story of the Scarlet Countess, who drank the blood of hundreds of virgins to stay young, it is clearly a kind of "dirty" talk that arouses and excites Stefan. Valerie is not yet willing to be seduced by this stranger and her ways, but it is obvious that Stefan harbors a dark side which finds voice as he experiments with sado-masochism and other sexual "kinks." Indeed, in the first weekend of marriage, Stefan beats his wife, is unfaithful to her, and commits murder. Once released, Stefan's passions simply cannot be controlled.

That's appropriate, because *Daughters of Darkness* is a movie about appetites, sexual and violent, and how sometimes when we give voice to those darkest desires, we lose control. "What happened to us, Stefan? Why did she cross our path?" Valerie wonders to her husband, referring to the force of nature, Battori. What she seems to be expressing in that quote is the Pandora's box principle: that you can't open the box of "pleasure" without releasing a monster too. Had Stefan and Valerie not been open, at least in some sense, to the sexual freedom embodied by Battori, they would not be involved in murder, death, infidelity and the like. In this sense, the movie seems to be about the dangers of a threesome, about the alienation of affection in an unhappy marriage when an interesting, attractive third party inserts himself or herself into the intimacy of a couple.

Kumel has a gift for expressing this provocative material in an artistic way. A bathroom sequence late in the film is an unsettling mix of sex, nudity and violence that seems to suggest, in Battori's world anyway, that all three are the same. There's also some nice

visual crosscutting between Stefan's neck and Ilona's hungry lips as they make love, a visual indicator of her everpresent need for blood. It's also rather clever the way Elizabeth's hands cast a reflection, but her face does not. It's a bizarre, but oddly effective updating of the "no reflection" aspect of vampirism.

Daughters of Darkness works best, however, when vampirism is used as a metaphor for passions unleashed. When the film actually depicts literal vampirism (Valerie and Elizabeth drinking hungrily from Stefan's wrists; Battori casting no reflection), it is less interesting, more obvious. For most of its running time *Daughters of Darkness* seems to understand that vampirism can be interchangeable with voyeurism, sadism, masochism, or any other outlet of repressed desire. Battori represents Stefan and Valerie's dark, experimental side, the side that is open to any and all of these things. When she acts independently as a long-lived vampire, drinking blood and actively trying to seduce Valerie, the picture loses some of its artistic luster. Thus *Daughters of Darkness* is quite exceptional because it works best as artistic metaphor, less so as vampire movie. It's a highbrow treat in a genre that has often been considered lowbrow. "I am just an outdated character," Battori bemoans at one point, and she is right—we've seen her ilk before in *Count Yorga*, *The Scars of Dracula* and the like—but Kumel puts the old clichés to new purpose in *Daughters of Darkness*, making the outdated seem daring, dangerous, and very, very erotic.

The Devils

Cast and Crew

CAST: Vanessa Redgrave (Sister Jeanne); Oliver Reed (Father Grandier); Dudley Sutton (Baron de Lombardemont); Murray Melvin (Father Mignon); Michael Gothard (Father Barre); Georgina Hale (Phillips); With: Max Adrian, John Woodvine, Judith Paris, Catherine Willmer, Iza Teller, Andrew Faulds.

CREW: *Directed by:* Ken Russell. *Based on the Play* The Devils *by:* John Whitney. *And Based on the Book*

The Devils of Loudon *by*: Aldous Huxley. *Screenplay by*: Ken Russell. *Produced by*: Robert H. Solo and Ken Russell. *Music*: Peter Maxwell Davies. *Film Editing*: Michael Bradsell. *Special Effects*: John Richards. Made at Pinewood Studios, London, England. A Russell Production, Ltd., distributed by Warner Brothers. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 103 minutes.

DETAILS: This is Ken (*Altered States* [1980], *Lair of the White Worm* [1989]) Russell's stylish (and searing indictment) of religion, and the atrocities done in the name of religion. It might only marginally be called horror, but it does trade on some grotesque imagery (including a hunch-backed nun...). All the terror starts when the priest of Loudon refuses to cooperate with the French government. The King's men want to demolish the town's fortifications, but the priest (Oliver Reed) sees it as a defense should the government turn against its people. The government and the Church then go to some lengths to destroy the priest's reputation, marking him as a witch. The movie is about politically motivated witch-hunts, and is particularly relevant following the Clinton impeachment of 1999. In both film and reality, a man's sexual failings are the rope with which the rabid opposition hopes to hang him. As horror, the film lingers on a graphic depiction of Christ's crucifixion, and climaxes in a nasty burning at the stake. This is a controversial, spiky, even inflammatory film that fits in with the witch-hunt tradition of such gory 1970s films as *Mark of the Devil* (1972). Functions simultaneously as satire, indictment, horror picture, and political thriller.

Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde

Cast and Crew

CAST: Ralph Bates (Dr. Jekyll); Martine Beswick (Sister Hyde); Gerald Sim (Professor Robertson); Lewis Fiander (Howard); Philip Madoc (Ryker); Paul Whitsun-Jones (Sgt. Danvers); Virginia Wetherell (Betsy).

CREW: *Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker. *Written by:* Brian Clemens. *Produced by:* Brian Clemens and Albert Fennell. *Director of Photography:* Norman Warwick. *Editor:* James Needs. Hammer Studios. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

DETAILS: Hammer's unusual take on the Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde mythos is energetic if nothing else. Here, Dr. Jekyll transforms into an evil woman (Martine Beswick), and all kinds of issues about sexuality and gender are raised ... and then abandoned in favor of horror tropes.

*Duel (1971) * * * **

Critical Reception

"...displays well Spielberg's ability to create an atmosphere laden with nerve-jangling tension."—John Brosnan, *Future Tense*, St. Martin's Press, 1978, page 217.

"Spielberg's direction is worthy of comparison with Hitchcock ... the nightmare in broad daylight recalls ... *North by Northwest*. The tense car drive and the use of recriminatory self-tormenting monologue reminds one of *Psycho*; the suggestion of malign intelligence in the strategy of the truck's attacks is similar to the way Hitchcock generates suspense in *The Birds*...."—Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, Bison Books Ltd., 1986, page 14.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Dennis Weaver (David Mann); Jacqueline Scott (Mrs. Mann); Eddie Firestone (Cafe Owner); Lou Frizzell (Bus Driver); Gene Dynarski (Man in Cafe); Lucille Benson (Lady at Snakerama); Tim Herbert (Gas Station Attendant); Charles Seel (Old Man); Shirley O'Hara (Waitress); Alexander Lockwood (Old Man in Car); Amy Douglass (Old

Woman in Car); Dick Whittington (Radio Interview); Gary Loftin (the Truck Driver); Dale Van Sickie (Car Driver).

CREW: Universal Studio Presents *Duel*. *Director of Photography:* Jack A Marta. *Art Director:* Robert S. Smith. *Set Decorator:* S. Blydenburgh. *Sound:* Edwin S. Hall. *Unit Production Manager:* Wallace Worsley. *Assistant Director:* Jim Fargo. *Film Editor:* Frank Morriss. *Stunt Coordinator:* Gary Loftin. *Titles and Optical:* Universal Title. *Color:* Technicolor. *Music:* Billy Goldenberg. *Screenplay:* Richard Matheson. *Based on a short story by:* Richard Matheson. *Produced by:* George Eckstein. *Directed by:* Steven Spielberg.

SYNOPSIS: A lone driver on a business trip innocently passes a filthy old truck on a long stretch of desert highway. In response to this perceived insult, the truck takes the initiative and passes the confused driver. Irritated, salesman Mr. Mann passes the truck again, and speeds far away from the slow-moving diesel vehicle. When David Mann stops at a gas station, the truck stops too, though Mann is able only to make out the driver's hands and cowboy boots. A little spooked, David calls his wife, and then gets back on the road. Oddly, the truck follows him again. Not wishing to get involved in anything dangerous, Mann gestures the truck by, but it deliberately goes slow. Patiently, Mann waits for a passing lane, but the truck refuses to let him by on the treacherous mountain roads. Then, the truck driver gestures David by ... right into oncoming traffic, and Mann is nearly killed. Late for an appointment and tired of playing games, David races off-road and leaves the truck far behind in the dust.

Later, the truck returns, riding up on David's tailgate. The truck runs David off the road at nearly 100 miles an hour. Shaken but whole, David stops at a local diner to recover. When he returns to his table from the rest room, however, he sees the offending truck parked just outside ... waiting for him. David confronts a patron he believes to be the driver, but he angers the wrong man. Afraid, David bides his time and waits for the truck to leave. When it does,

David gets back on the road and offers assistance to an overheated school bus. Just when David's vehicle is the most vulnerable, the truck returns for another pass. David escapes this unusual trap and races away. Unfortunately, his progress is slowed by a train crossing. The truck re-appears and attempts to push Mann's car into the oncoming train. Mann escapes again, but the truck will not give up the chase.

Mann stops at a gas station to phone the police, but the truck runs down the phone booth and then circles Mann, stalking him like a crazed predator. Mann makes it back to his car and returns to the road. He pulls into a ditch and decides to hide for an hour. When he resumes his trip, the malevolent truck is still waiting for him, just ahead. Mann asks the drivers of passing vehicles for help, but no one will assist him. When the truck gestures Mann ahead again, the final race is on. Soon, Mann's little Valiant is overheating after an extended chase, and dropping speed rapidly. Mann races down a mountainside, the truck in close pursuit. At the last minute, David jumps from his vehicle and the monster truck careens off the mountaintop in a fireball.

COMMENTARY: Including *Duel* in this book is no doubt a cheat. It is a film made for American television, not theatrical release, and this author has made the conscious decision to exclude TV product, because otherwise this book would be gigantic. TV movies would make for an excellent reference book, no doubt, all on their own. But, *Duel* is such a good and important film (and it did play theatrically in Europe...) that it seems a crime not to include it here. It is a bravura early film by Steven Spielberg (who helmed *Jaws*—one of the greatest horror films of the 1970s), and is important historically in light of its director's subsequent career.

It's fascinating to see how *Duel* has been assembled into a taut engine of horror. An everyday situation (road rage) escalates quickly into horror, but Spielberg doesn't assemble his picture in the conventional manner that other directors might. Instead, *Duel* is constructed almost piecemeal from a collection of brief, informative detail shots: of spinning wheels, of headlights, of gauges, of mirrors, of train lights, and the like. The cumulative effect is riveting. It's as though the audience is being stalked, for it is we who monitor the

speedometer along with Weaver, hear the hum of the motor, gaze out across the windshield, see the road rolling by, and even look down to view a foot pump the gas pedal. In essence, Spielberg puts his viewers in the driver's seat, and it is impossible not to identify with Weaver's character. We get sensory information about the chase as the protagonist does, as though we are driving the car (or at least co-piloting). Until virtual reality movies, *Duel* is about as close as you can get to interactive film. It's a brilliant way to direct a horror movie, and a clever way of fostering audience identification. Each shot is carefully constructed to convey important information about the race, the film's primary scenario.

Spielberg's technique is effective in other ways too. As he would do in *Jaws*, Spielberg hides the villain for as long as he can. In *Jaws*, the shark was rarely seen because of mechanical difficulties with the killer fish mock-up, but in *Duel*, Spielberg hides the driver of the truck so as to maintain the mystery of the villain. Who is this driver: Devil, demon or man? Why has he attacked so violently? Why is he so relentless? All these questions are raised, but Spielberg never answers them, and so *Duel* feels like a descent into a nightmare, into utter irrationality. What kind of world is it where passing someone on the road is a crime punishable by pursuit and murder? Is it just egregious road rage or the hand of a demon out to destroy Weaver's character? *Duel* is frightening because all those questions are raised.

Richard Matheson's *Duel* screenplay is a perfect launching pad for Spielberg, and is adept in the way it develops Weaver's driver. The audience is privy to his thoughts, and they feel pretty real. He escalates into full-scale panic, mulls over apologies, and acts out possibilities in his mind. This approach reveals to viewers how our minds keep replaying and reinterpreting traumatic events, trying to make them right in our heads so we can move on. Yet Mann, the driver, is denied any peace, because there is no rational explanation for the ambush against him. The audience identifies with him because his inner monologues keep trying to reason through the situation ... and keep failing. It is frightening to be confronted with the inexplicable, and Weaver's portrait of Mann, buttressed by internal soliloquies, presents a believable picture of an everyman confronted by the unusual, the terrifying, the unreal.

Until *The Road Warrior* (1982) and *The Hitcher* (1985), *Duel* is probably the best “road” chase movie ever made. The climax is a surprising reversal of expectations: after an extended fast chase (over 100 miles an hour), both vehicles overheat and fight to chug uphill, going ever more slowly as they arduously ascend a mountain, until the chase is actually a crawl. There are clever touches too (Mann drives a Valiant—a heroic car for a hero), and the truck blurts out a death rattle, like a dying monster, as it rolls off the mountain to its demise). But most of all, the movie is a suspenseful, exciting chase.

“One stupid thing happens ... and there you are, right back in the jungle,” Mann bemoans, under assault from the demonic driver and his mechanical steed. That’s the key to *Duel*’s success: it shows how one incident at the wrong time and the wrong place can descend quickly and irrevocably into terror. Kudos to Steven Spielberg and his audacious, brilliant, ever-fluid camera work. *Duel* was his calling card to Hollywood, and it is bravura work—even if made for TV.

***Equinox* (1971) * * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: Edward Connell (Dave Fielding); Barbara Hewitt (Susan); Frank Boers, Jr. (Jim); Robin Christopher (Vicki); Jack Woods (Asmodeus); Jim Phillips, Fritz Leiber, Patrick Burke, Jim Duron, Sharon Gray, Louis Clayton, Norvelle Brooks, Irving L. Lichtenstein.

CREW: Jack H. Harris Presents a Tonlyn Production, *Equinox*. *Special Photographic Effects:* Dennis Muren. *Associate Producers:* David Allen, Jim Danforth. *Based on a story by:* Mark Thomas McGee. *Music Supervisor:* John Capers. *Production Manager:* Sam Altonian. *Script Supervisor:* Jill Murphy. *Assistant Cameraman:* Ed Begley, Jr. *Production Assistant:* Bob Woods. *Gaffer:* Joel Chernoff. *Grip:* Ben Harwood, Jr. *Make-up:* Robynne Hoover. *Editor:* John Joyce. *Sound Effects:* Edit International. *Opticals:* Howard A. Anderson, Co. *Mixer:* Bradley Lane. *Director of Photography:* Mike Hoover. *Color:* DeLuxe. *Producer:* Jack H. Harris. *Written and directed by:* Jack Woods. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 82 minutes.

P.O.V.

“If you know which scenes were shot by Dennis and which scenes were done later by Jack Harris, shot by Mike Hoover, you can see the difference, because the stuff Hoover shot did not blow-up very well [to 35 mm]. The stuff Dennis shot is nice.... I still think the basic idea of the story for *Equinox* is kind of a viable thing. I was really impressed.... I was not pleased by the way Harris gave everybody the shaft”⁶.—Special effects Artist Jim Danforth recalls his feelings about *Equinox* (1971).

SYNOPSIS: A young man named David Fielding is stalked in the woods by something evil after his three friends are killed. He makes it to a highway, and is struck by a driver-less car, but survives the collision.

A year and one day later, a reporter visits David, now a depressed “melancholic,” in an asylum. David is non-communicative, but his attending physician shares information with the reporter about the disturbed patient. He plays a tape recording of an interview with David from the time of his admittance...

A year earlier, David, his blind date, Susan, friend Jim, and Jim’s girlfriend Vicki went on a picnic to a remote cabin in the woods to meet with Dr. Johanson, a geology professor. They drove to the mountains, hit a dead end, and walked up a long cabin trail in search of Johanson’s place, only to find it destroyed. They ran into a mysterious forest ranger named Asmodeus, who warned them to leave the woods.

The foursome walked a little further and spied a giant castle on a glen. En route to it, they heard a cackling emanating from a cave. Inside, a strange old man gave the four young adults a book. David attempted to translate the book, written in Latin, at least until Dr. Johanson showed up, transformed into a raving lunatic, and stole it. David chased the professor to a creek, where the old man died relinquishing the book. While the group investigated the text, some kind of medieval witch’s book, Asmodeus attacked Susan, only to be repelled by her crucifix.

The special book, 1000 years old, soon revealed to the group that forces of evil co-existed with good on Earth, and the object of evil was to counteract its opposite. Johanson’s scribbled notes in the text then revealed how he followed instructions and summoned evil manifestations. He saw physical instability in these manifestations, however, and was unable to control what he had released from Pandora’s box. Frightened, David, Susan, Vicki and Jim returned to the castle, to discover it had disappeared, apparently into the instability of another dimension.

Meanwhile, Asmodeus summoned a giant simian monster to kill the group and steal the book. The attempt failed, primarily because

David and the others had fashioned primitive protective icons out of available materials in the forest. When Susan lost her crucifix, she became evil, infected by Asmodeus, and David had to save her. She recovered sufficiently, but was frightened. Then Jim was confronted by Asmodeus, who still wanted the all-powerful book. When Jim was pulled across the barrier of dimensional instability in the grip of a giant, David followed him to the netherworld. There, Asmodeus tricked David and returned to reality, where he killed Vicki.

David and Susan combated Asmodeus, now transformed into a winged devil, with a crucifix, but Susan was injured in the ensuing explosion. David escaped into the woods, but not before hearing a warning that Asmodeus would kill him in one year and one day.

One year and one day later, a possessed Susan finds her way to the mental institution just as the reporter, having found nothing worth reporting, leaves.

COMMENTARY: There is one inexplicable fact of Hollywood: everyone has to start somewhere. And, some of today's greatest special effects legends, including Dennis Muren (*Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* [1999]), Jim Danforth (*They Live* [1988]) and Dave Allen (*Laserblast* [1978]) began their careers with a low-budget student film called *Equinox*. The picture was made for \$8,000 dollars, took four years to make, and producer Jack Harris (*Dark Star* [1975]) bought the picture, re-shot some scenes and added others. The final result is a promising film, one rife with talent, but in the final analysis, somewhat lacking. Yet, despite its flaws, *Equinox* is an important film because many of its themes (and even some shots) have re-occurred in popular later productions such as *The Evil Dead* (1983) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).

Equinox is directed with plenty of energy and low-budget zeal, but the game effort is severely undercut by bland performances, and an obsession with special effects sequences that don't stand up to lingering attention. The performers and their characters are problematic. The heroes are pretty ineffectual, and the actresses sometimes appear only half-interested in what is occurring. On the level of a *Scooby Doo* episode, the characters come off as hopelessly square, and also somewhat confused. This may indeed be because several scenes were re-shot and the talent may not have understood

how sequences would fit together. On that matter, the re-shoots are obvious. Vicki's haircut and weight vacillate from shot-to-shot, sometimes within the same scene. Pounds are lost, then gained, then lost again. The result is a film that seems jumbled.



Not the Jolly Green Giant, but an incredible simulation. One of the “demons” conjured by the Necrinomicon in *Equinox* (1971).

Dialogue is a stumbling block. “Do you have a flashlight in the car?” One character asks. “No, I haven’t,” replies the other, in stilted, perfect English. A simple shake of the head would have done, and that’s the problem. These student filmmakers (and it is important to remember they were students when the film was made) do not yet understand that film is a visual medium, and that it is not actually necessary to use dialogue to explain everything. The dubbing/looping of the dialogue is also less than quality work, but, again, this was a student film.

The effects in *Equinox*, though remarkable for their time and budget, don’t stand up today, either. There are plenty of stop-motion junkies out there, and there is no doubt that stop-motion animation was still a viable special effects option in the ’70s, but

today the procedure seems dated, especially under the gaze of color photography. Also, there is an unfortunate tendency with stop-motion animation to show off. Monsters don't just fall over and die. They stagger, whinny, lunge, feint and then fall, giving audiences plenty of time to realize that we are looking at lifeless miniatures lovingly manipulated by invisible hands. This is true in *Equinox*, as it is in other films using the process, but it harder to stomach in color, and the stop-motion is, politely, not on the level of a Willis O'Brien or a Ray Harryhausen. Make-up isn't very good either. When Jim is possessed by Asmodeus, black eyeshadow underlines his face, and what should have been a subtle effect is instead a kind of humorous forecasting of the 1980s punk look.

Despite all these flaws, *Equinox* has merit. It casts a creepy, unnerving atmosphere, features a good natural setting, and is ambitious in story and scope. In fact, it was a rather daring and bold an initiative for its time. Look at it this way: *Equinox* features an "adept demonologist" (Johanson) who discovers a demonic book, takes it to his remote cabin in the woods, and inadvertently conjures demonic forces. Those forces then kill him and run amok in the forest. As any horror fan will recall, that is the precise plot of Sam Raimi's brilliant (and far superior) *Evil Dead* films. *Evil Dead II: Dead By Dawn* (1987) even quotes directly from *Equinox* in its opening shot. A rotating book (the Necrinomicon) flies through a void (in stop motion). That is a shot lifted right from *Equinox*. Another moment, that of tape recorder wheels spinning, is also lifted from *Equinox* and inserted in the original *Evil Dead*. No doubt these moments are intended as homage, but they are nonetheless derivative.

The idea of a dark, supernatural evil in the woods, killing teens, is also at the core of *The Blair Witch Project*. The protective (and evil) icons fashioned in *Equinox* are even seen again in the Haxan symbol that came to be *Blair Witch's* trademark. Considering its descendants, *Equinox* had quite an impact on horror filmmakers, even if those filmmakers created superior, more confident visions.

Equinox was clearly intended to be an ambitious horror picture on a grand scale. It featured spectacles (giant stop motion monsters, castles, and clashes with flying demons), and even a downbeat,

nihilistic ending. Its makers should be commended for influencing the course of horror history with their powerful imagery and forward-thinking notions, even if, in the final analysis, their film isn't very good.

***Hands of the Ripper* (1971) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

“...*Hands of the Ripper* has a good deal of ghoulish truck with the idea that the most storied Victorian killer, Jack the Ripper has passed his gory predilections on to his pretty blonde daughter....”—A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, July 14, 1972, page 19.

“Offbeat ... ripping good.”—John Stanley, *Creature Features Strikes Again*, 1994, page 173.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Eric Porter (Pritchard); Jane Merrow (Laura); Derek Godfrey (Dysart); Angharad Rees (Anna); Marjorie Rhodes (Mrs. Bryant); Keith Bill (Michael); Margaret Rawlings (Madame Bullard); Lynda Baren (Long Liz); Marjie Lawrence (Dolly); Norman Bird (Police Inspector); Elizabeth MacLennan (Mrs. Wilson); A.J. Brown (Reverend Anderson); Barry Lowe (Mr. Wilson); April Wilding (Catherine); Anne Clune (1st Cell Whore); Vicki Woolf (2nd Cell Whore); Katya Wyeth (1st Public Whore); Beulah Hughes (2nd Public Whore); Peter Munt (Pleasants); Philip Ryan (Police Constable); Molly Weir (Maid); Charles Lamb (Guard).

CREW: The Rank Organization Presents a Hammer Production. *Director of Photography:* Kenneth Talbot. *Production Manager:* Christopher Sutton. *Art Director:* Roy Stannard. *Editor:* Chris Barnes. *Music Composed by:* Christopher Gunning. *Musical*

Supervisor: Philip Martell. *Assistant Director:* Arici Levy. *Sound Recordist:* Kevin Sutton. *Sound Editor:* Frank Goulding. *Continuity:* Gladys Goldsmith. *Make-up Supervisor:* Bunty Phillips. *Hairdressing Supervisor:* Pat McDermott. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Rosemary Burrows. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Eileen Sullivan. *Special Effects:* Cliff Culley *Construction Manager:* Arthur Banks. *Dubbing Mixer:* Ken Barker. *Screenplay by:* L.W. Davidson. *From an original story by:* Edward Spencer Shew. *Produced by:* Aida Young. *Directed by:* Peter Sasdy. Made at Pinewood Studios. A Hammer Production, distributed by Rank Film Distributors Ltd. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 82 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Victorian England, Jack the Ripper returns from a night of murder and mayhem to brutally kill the mother of his young daughter, Anna. Anna witnesses the crime, and comes to associate the glowing light of the fire, reflected on her brass bed, with terrible violence. After years spent in an orphanage, Anna is given a home by the fraudulent spiritual medium Mrs. Golding. In need of cash, Golding also prostitutes the 17-year-old girl to a wealthy customer, Mr. Dysart. When Dysart gives Anna a piece of jewelry that glimmers strangely in the light, Anna goes crazy and attempts to kill him. She impales Golding with a fireplace poker.

The police conduct an investigation, but a witness to the crime, one Dr. Pritchard, fails to place Dysart at the scene ... deliberately. Instead, he adopts Anna and, as a student of Freud and psychology, attempts to reform the murderous girl ... who has no memory of her violent activity. Dysart thinks Anna is possessed, but Pritchard believes psychoanalysis can help her. At the same time Anna becomes a houseguest, Pritchard's son, Michael, invites his blind fiancée, Laura, to stay there as well.

Before Pritchard can help Anna, she kills one of his servants, brutally slashing her throat. As before, the trigger for the violence is a piece of jewelry that shines a certain way. Pritchard sedates Anna, and then hides the evidence of her crime. When Dysart comes up empty-handed on trying to learn Anna's background, he makes an

appointment for Anna and Pritchard with a psychic named Mrs. Bullard. A skeptical man of science, Pritchard instead hypnotizes Anna to learn the truth of her childhood. He is interrupted during the session, and Anna takes to the streets in a fragile state. There, she kills a prostitute. Too late to avert the violence, Pritchard finds her, and brings her home.

Desperate to help Anna shed the violent side of her personality, Pritchard relents and takes her to see Mrs. Bullard. The psychic reveals that Anna's father was Jack the Ripper. Furthermore, she sees the identity of the notorious criminal, and warns that Anna is possessed by the violence of her father. Anna kills Bullard, and Pritchard flees the premises. After witnessing the crime, Pritchard learns that flickering lights are key to Anna's violent episodes. He tests his theory, and Anna subsequently spears him in the gut with a sword.

Still in a hypnotic trance, Anna joins Michael and Laura for an afternoon carriage ride. Bleeding to death, Pritchard manages to warn his son of Anna's true nature. They race to St. Paul's cathedral, and the Whispering Gallery, to save Laura before she is the next victim. Rather than let the Ripper's spirit lead her to commit a final act of violence, Anna jumps to her death ... and lands beside the corpse of Pritchard ... who has finally succumbed to his wound.

COMMENTARY: *Hands of the Ripper* is a rarity: A Hammer horror movie that is serious, gritty, and thoughtful. Its tale of a man of science's fall from grace also happens to be laced with enough explicit gore to satisfy the most hard-core horror fans. In all, it's an appealing mix of the grotesque, and a rather thoughtful film.

This is not the average Hammer horror picture, a decorative period piece with extravagant and opulent sets, and women prowling about in diaphanous gowns. Instead, the film presents a dark, disturbing and gritty image of Victorian London. In one of the early scenes, a woman pimps her 17-year-old girl without a second thought. "There, there girl, it happens to all of us." She calmly tells her ward. In another scene, a man is incarcerated in a jail cell with a group of ugly, hooting and hollering hookers. In other words, this film has no illusions about the Victorian world. It depicts a grungy,

muddy London where old whores in garish make-up walk the streets trying to make a living. It's a new look for Hammer, and a very good one.

Perhaps more interestingly, *Hands of the Ripper* develops a rather mature screenplay that focuses on a tragic figure's fall from grace. Mr. Pritchard is a man of intellect, a man of science, and a man of the upper class. He is society's best, he is well read, and he is confident in his own knowledge. It is that confidence which ultimately proves to be his downfall. In attempting to study the criminal mind, Pritchard in fact develops his own criminal instincts: covering for Anna, hiding bodies, obstructing justice and the like. In the final analysis, Pritchard is killed trying to prove that his theory about Anna is correct, and his son and daughter-in-law nearly pay the price for his hubris. In all, the downfall of Pritchard, a man who thinks he can solve the problem and learn all the answers, is a reminder of the old proverb that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. If only he had left well-enough alone, Pritchard wouldn't have put himself or his family in danger.

This story of psychology, possession and tragedy is punctuated by moments of extreme gore. Mr. Golding is impaled through a door on a fireplace poker in one early set piece. In another, Anna sticks a hatpin in a prostitute's eye. At another moment, Anna slits the throat of Pritchard's servant, Dolly, and blood splatters everywhere. Yet, no doubt, the *pièce de résistance*, is Pritchard's own mortal wound, and his valiant attempt to recover from it. Anna sticks a sword in his side and escapes. Pritchard, still alive, hinges the handle of the sword (still lodged in his body) on a door knob, and then pushes himself off the lengthy, bloody blade. This is all far more bloody than most Hammer films, but it all works remarkably well in this gritty setting. The point of the film is that Anna's violence is total (and bloody), and that science can't explain it. Thus the violence is rather necessary. It also serves as a nice counterpoint to Anna's innocent demeanor. She is indeed quite murderous, but she is not a villain in the traditional sense, which as Al Gore might say, is a "distinction without a difference." In other words, she commits horrible acts but is ultimately not hated by audiences because she is in the grip of forces she cannot control.

Hands of the Ripper is a good film. Though its flirtation with the supernatural (the possession of the living by the dead) is only half-explored, the movie's notions of science's inadequacies, and Mr. Pritchard's arrogance, have resonance. This is a world without happy endings, of grit and dirt, where even an innocent girl is plagued by the "sins of the fathers." Yet it's a world worth visiting.

Hatchet for a Honeymoon (1971) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Stephen Forsyth (John Harrington); Dagmar Lassander, Laura Betti, Jesus Puente, Femi Benussi, Antonia Mas, Alan Collin, Gerard Tichy, Veronica Llimera, Fortunato Pascuale, Jose Ignacio Abadaz, Silvia Llenas, Monserrat Riba.

CREW: A Spanish-Italian co-production, Pan Latina Films and Mercury Films of Peliculas Ibarra & CIA, S.A, present *Hatchet for a Honeymoon*. *Screenplay* [sic]: Santiago Moncada. *Assistant Directors:* Ricardo Walker, Lamberto Bava. *Continuity Girl:* Patricia Zulini. *Assistant Producer:* Enzo Feria. *Cameramen:* Jaime Deu Casas, Emilio Barriano. *Assistant Cameramen:* Arcline Carla, Marcelo Anconetani. *Hairstylist:* Hipolita Lopez, Emilia Achini. *Stillmen:* Jose Adrian, Giuseppe Parrabano. *Film Editor:* Soledad Lopez. *Make-up:* Elisa Aspach, Piero McCacci. *Set Design:* Jesus McHerrero. *Costumes:* Jose McTresserra. *Laboratory:* Fotofilm Madrid S.A, Technostampa, Roma. *Color:* Eastmancolor. *Studio:* Balcazar, Barcelona. *Sound:* Arcofon, Fono Roma. *Music:* Sante Romitelli. *Director of Photography:* Mario Bava. *Production Manager:* Jaine Fernandez Cid. *Assistant Manager:* Pedro Villanueva, Graciano Fabiani. *Producer:* Manuel Cano. *Directed by:* Mario Bava. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 84 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: John Harrington is a deranged psychopath who feels

compelled to murder newlywed brides. A 30-year-old “paranoiac,” this wealthy, handsome, playboy also happens to be married to a cold woman named Mildred, who does not suspect he has already killed five women. Harrington wants a divorce from Mildred, but she won’t permit it. Meanwhile, John’s business specializes in the fashion needs of newlyweds, his strange obsession.

When John goes to a séance with Mildred, his dead mother speaks through her and tells John to behave. Not long after, police investigate John in connection with the murders, and search the green house, where John has buried three bodies. Fortunately for John, the corpses are not discovered.

Meanwhile, a beautiful model informs John she will have to quit modeling for him because she is getting married. An aroused (and murderous) John asks to see her that evening, and offers her a wedding dress. When he sees her in the gown, he kills her, and feels he has started to come closer to understanding his compulsion. He believes it stems from a traumatic incident in childhood.

John’s new model is actually the suspicious sister of the deceased girl. She courts John, even while suspecting he murdered her sister. Mildred, also suspicious, attempts to snare John in an infidelity, but he dresses up in a wedding veil and hacks her to death with a cleaver.

As John continues to kill and the police circle ever closer, he remembers his boyhood trauma. As a boy, he murdered his mother because he did not want her to re-marry. Even as this realization dawns, the ghost of Mildred starts to haunt John, saying she will never leave his side, even in death. John is finally captured by the police before he can kill again. He is arrested, and through it all, the shrewish Mildred remains at his side.

COMMENTARY: Despite its lurid title, *Hatchet for a Honeymoon* is a solid psychodrama. It’s a little rough in spots, but on the whole is rather impressive. Director Mario Bava’s gift is with imagery, not plotting or clarity, and this movie reflects that virtue and those faults. It is a child, or grandchild of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), and an antecedent to *American Psycho* (2000), but possessed of a quirky Hitchcockian-style. The big surprise here is not a first act murder of

a prominent character, but the third act shift to a more overt supernatural theme.

Unlike Norman Bates, John Harrington in *Hatchet for a Honeymoon* is known to be a psycho from the very beginning of the film. “The fact is, I’m completely mad,” he acknowledges, after introducing himself to the audience. In these little internal monologues, John explains his hang-ups and his behavior the best he can. He sees his madness and his life as a “ridiculous” and “brief” drama. More to the point, he believes that “a woman should live till her wedding night, love once, and then die.” As one might imagine, that anti-social philosophy causes him some problems in the end. But the decision to let Harrington narrate much of his own mis-adventure looks forward not only to *American Psycho*, with its delicious voice-over monologues, it grounds the audience in the character’s plight before leaping into points unknown. Harrington is a psycho, but he’s our psycho, and to some extent, we sympathize with him, despite his madness. Evil is attractive, and we simultaneously loathe him and hope he will elude capture.

As is typical for the work of Mario Bava, *A Hatchet for the Honeymoon* is filled with moments of cinematic inspiration. He brilliantly directs one suspense scene, wherein blood drips from a staircase onto a carpet, just beside a nosy police officer. Below the officer, a bloody hand is visible, reflected in a glass-top table. Throughout the scene, the audience is aware, and on edge, that Harrington’s crime will be discovered, and Bava plays that anxiety for as long as possible. In another memorable moment, the ghostly Mildred ascends a grand staircase towards Harrington’s room. Bava places his camera at floor level (at the top of the staircase), and Mildred’s blurry head darts up suddenly in a jolting moment. Though psychologically speaking, the film is bunk (these movies, including *Psycho*, almost always are), Bava also has a good understanding of the material. It’s nice the way he plays the supernatural. Is it “real” or is the ghostly Mildred just alive in the mind of a lunatic? The terrain is fertile for an artist of Bava’s instincts.

“A madman can also have good reasons,” John declares of his killing spree, and a mad movie can also be done with a level of

ingenuity. Whether playing on the innate creepiness of mannequins, or gleefully dashing the expectations of blushing brides by marring their immaculate gowns with crimson blood, *A Hatchet for a Honeymoon* has delightful method behind its madness.

The House That Dripped Blood

Cast and Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Philip); Christopher Lee (Reid); Jon Pertwee (Paul); Ingrid Pitt, Denholm Elliott, Joanna Dunham, Geoffrey Bayldon

CREW: *Directed by:* Peter Duffell. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg, Milton Subotsky. *Written by:* Robert Bloch. *Music:* Michael Dress. *Editor:* Peter Tanner. Cinerama Releasing. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 101 minutes.



Jon Pertwee and Ingrid Pitt get close in *The House That Dripped*

Blood (1971).

DETAILS: Another Subotsky/Rosenberg anthology, with material written by Robert Bloch (a la *Asylum* [1972]). A quartet of stories revolving around an evil “house,” *The House That Dripped Blood* opens with “Method for Murder,” about a writer whose monstrous, psychotic creation comes to life to attack his wife. “Waxworks” is just what it sounds like, the story of a twisted wax museum and its murderous owner. “Sweets to the Sweet” concerns a young girl who creates a voodoo doll. Finally, “The Cloak” (starring Pertwee and Pitt) involves a hammy horror movie actor who purchases an authentic vampire cape.

I, Monster

Cast and Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Dr. Marlowe/Edward Blake); Peter Cushing (Frederick Utterson); Mike Raven (Enfield); Susan Jameson (Diane).

CREW: *Directed by:* Stephen Weeks. *Written by:* Milton Subotsky. *Based on the Novel by:* Robert Louis Stevenson. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. *Director of Photography:* Moray Grant. *Film Editor:* Peter Tanner. *Music:* Carl Davis. From Amicus. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 75 minutes.

DETAILS: Another Amicus production, this one a deadly serious version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As its short running time indicates, there was precious little variation or inspiration here, though Christopher Lee is, as usual, remarkable. Reportedly shot to be a 3-D picture, but never released in that format.

Jack’s Wife (1971) (a.k.a. Hungry Wives and Season of the Witch) * * * 1½

Critical Reception

“Today its sexual politics are obvious and off-putting.... Like most of Romero’s work, it’s made mostly of suburban locations and subtly acted by a de-glamorized unknown cast. The too-talky story can be seen as strict realism without any supernatural elements. In that respect, it’s a companion piece to Romero’s *Martin*, though not nearly as suspenseful or engrossing.”—Mike Mayo, *VideoHound’s Horror Show*, Visible Ink Press, 1998, page 316.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jan White (Joan Mitchell); Virginia Greenwald (Marion); Ray Lane (Greg); Anne Muffly (Shirley); Joedda McClain, Bill Thunhurst, Nell Fisher, Esther Lapidus, Dan Mallinger, Dary Montgomery, Ken Peters, Shirlee Strasser, Bob Trow, Jean Wechsler, Charlotte Carter, Linda Creagan, Bill Hinzman, Marvin Lieber, Paul McCollough, Sue Michaels, Hal Priore, Luis Vochim.

CREW: This is a film from the Latent Image, Inc. *Cinematography:* George A. Romero. *Light and Additional Photography:* Bill Hinzman. *Sound Recordist:* Gerald Schutz. *Post-Production:* Bob Rutkowski. *Editorial:* Paul McCollough. *Properties:* H. Cramer Riblett. *Sound Assistant:* Rex Gleason. *Special Effects:* Rege Survinski. *Make-up:* Bonnie Priore. *Make-up Assistant:* Irene Croft. *Hair Styles:* Jim George. *Costumes/Furnishings:* Gimbels. *Production Supervisor:* Vince Survinski. *Associate Producer:* Gary Streiner. *Title Sequence:* The Animators. *Lab:* Du Art. *Color:* WRS Motion Picture Laboratories. Produced through the facilities of The Latent Image, Inc., Pittsburgh. *Song “Season of the Witch” sung by:* Donovan. *Original Electronic Music:* Steve Gorn. *Executive Producer:* Alvin Croft. *Written by:* George A. Romero. *Produced by:* Nancy M.

Romero. *Directed by:* George A. Romero. *M.P.A.A.*
Rating: R. *Running Time:* 105 minutes.

P.O.V.

“*Jack’s Wife* was really sort of a feminist picture. The beginning days of women’s liberation, and so forth. Even though I wrote it, I wrote it based on the feelings and observations of some female friends of mine. This was a script I liked very much, but due to the financial muddle, I had to work with half the anticipated budget and without the technical and creative support I needed”⁷.—George Romero, on his horror follow-up to *Night of the Living Dead*.

SYNOPSIS: Forty-year-old Joan Mitchell sees herself as “Jack’s wife,” and little else. In her dreams, she walks subserviently six paces behind her husband as he carelessly snaps tree branches in her face and reads the morning paper. In the same dream, Jack puts Joan on a leash and collar, and leaves her at a kennel while he goes away to continue his life. The kennel soon transforms into the Mitchell home, and Joan sees herself as a lifelong inmate there. Worse, when she confronts herself in the mirror, she sees her reflection as a withered, decrepit hag. Joan awakens from this dream, and tells her therapist about it. He informs her that the only person isolating and imprisoning Joan is Joan herself.

One night, Jack and Joan go to a party at their friend Larry’s house, and Joan finds herself secretly tantalized when she learns of a new neighbor who claims to be a witch. A few days later, Joan and her friend Shirley go to visit the witch, Marion. Shirley sits for a tarot card reading, and Marion’s fortune-telling abilities prove uncannily accurate about the failure of Shirley’s romance with her husband, Larry. The cards also reveal that Shirley has been having a secret affair with a man named David. All the while, Joan finds herself attracted to the world of the occult, though she is appalled it has become a trendy hobby for local WASPs and disillusioned wives.

On returning home, Joan meets her daughter Nikki’s boyfriend, a

sociology teaching assistant named Greg. Almost immediately, Joan is attracted to Greg, but is furious when he gets Shirley drunk on martinis and tricks her into believing that she has been smoking marijuana. Afterwards, Greg apologizes to Joan for the game but reminds her that she was complicit in the con. Later, Joan overhears Nikki and Greg making love and is driven to physical distraction by it. Nikki is upset that her mother has listened in on this intimate moment and leaves the house with all of her belongings. Making matters worse, Jack blames Joan for the situation, and slaps her across the face for failing to stop Nikki's deflowering in their very own house.

Though questioned by the police about Nikki's abrupt departure, Joan protects Greg. Then she dismisses her maid so she can be alone in the house while Jack goes away on a business trip. Excited, Joan visits Greg at the college and he tells her he is available. Joan feigns disinterest, unable to commit adultery, and returns home—frustrated. That night, Joan detects an intruder outside the house. A masked madman with a knife breaks into the Mitchell home and sexually assaults Joan ... but it is only a nightmare. This strange vision is the impetus Joan needs to explore her dark side. Alone in her house, she purchases the necessary books and materials to become a witch. Joan throws herself into her witchcraft, and conducts a spell to bring Greg to her. He accommodates, and they make passionate love. Later, Joan sees Marion and asks to become a member of her coven.

All the while, Joan continues to have disturbing dreams in which a masked man breaks into the house and attacks her. She also continues to have sexual escapades with Greg. She even informs him that she's a witch, and that her powers brought him to her bed. He refuses to believe in superstitious nonsense and they have a falling out. Later, Joan conjures another spell, invoking a dark "lord."

As she sleeps that night, Joan hears an intruder for real and, armed with a shotgun, shoots him dead. In reality, there was no intruder, only Jack returning home early from his business trip. Joan is found innocent of murder, and now continues her life as a single woman. At the local parties, a black clad Joan now introduces herself to

others as a witch.

COMMENTARY: George Romero is one of the genre's greats, no doubt. *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) was arguably the most influential and oft-imitated horror film of the 1960s (with the possible exceptions of *Psycho* [1960] and *Rosemary's Baby* [1968]). His work in the early '70s (*Jack's Wife*, *The Crazies*) is not usually as highly regarded as his "zombie" pictures, like *Dawn of the Dead* [1979] or his camp treat, *Creepshow* (1981), yet in many ways these efforts remain more interesting. Take *Jack's Wife*, for instance. It is written, directed, and perhaps most importantly, filmed and edited by Romero. He wears many hats here, and thus the film can be seen as a more accurate and concentrated (rather than diffuse) reflection of his own personal ethos. The film is very good, though overlong, and benefits enormously from Romero's visual sense and keen understanding of film editing.

Jack's Wife opens with an informative, thematically rich dream sequence. Joan is seen on a wooded trail, walking well behind her husband as he reads a newspaper, oblivious. He is unaware that he is snapping branches in her face. The inference is obviously that he is hurting his wife by not paying attention to her. This is important because the film does not see Jack as a brutal or ritual abuser of woman (though he does strike Joan at one point in the film). Instead, he is seen as being a rather average middle class husband, and his crime is in neglecting Joan, and not seeing her as a person.

The wooded trail itself seems to represent the path of Joan's life, with things lost on the trail: a baby that died, *et al.* This sequence supplies much detail, and reveals much about Joan's vision of her life, but it is a bit long, and in parts obvious. Indeed, this is the primary fault of most early Romero films: he carries on with good scenes too long, thereby lessening their impact. After the wooded trail, the same dream sequence continues, with Joan leashed and caged like a dog. Then it continues even further, depicting Joan's home as a kind of nursing home/prison. The trail sequence is strong enough on its own without two further variations defining Joan's sense of irrelevance. Nonetheless, the scene is splendidly edited and well conceived.

Romero's central arguments in the film are twofold. The first is that

the supernatural is only the latest fad for a bored suburban community. It actually has no power unless given power. "Voodoo only works because you believe it works. Your mind does the work," one character acknowledges in the film. This is a common Romero conceit, repeated in *Martin*, the story of a boy who fancies himself a supernatural vampire but is in fact just a lonely, sick kid. Thus, everything that occurs in *Jack's Wife* can be interpreted two ways. Either Joan is a witch summoning the supernatural, or she believes she is a witch summoning the supernatural. The illusion of the supernatural gives Joan the personal confidence to call Greg, but is there really a dark power at work outside Joan? Probably not, but the film walks a fine line. Religion (including the wiccan way) is a convenient scapegoat when you want to blame the Devil for your own misdeeds, but is also, inevitably, empowering to those who truly believe. The ambiguity surrounding Joan's witchcraft is fascinating, but is probably less than thrilling to the average horror fan, who wants "evil" to be tangible, and real. As usual, Romero confounds those expectations, making a balanced, interesting, and intelligent film instead of a simple genre one.

The second argument in the film is actually about suburbia more than it is about female power (or imprisonment). Romero sees it as a realm of boredom, no matter what. Boredom can result in infidelity, drug-use, or even ... witchcraft. Joan is something of a hypocrite. Like Greg, she claims to want people to be honest, to confront the substance of their life. Yet Joan is obsessed with appearances. Several times in the film she confronts her own reflection in the mirror, and it shows her prematurely aged. It is that fear that she is unfulfilled and getting older that informs her choice to become a witch. She is horrified that many see witchcraft as a fad, but she jumps on board the trend anyway. *Jack's Wife* is about the image of things, of witchcraft, of sex, and of marriage, and how people manipulate those images to create an outward image of oneself for the community. Yes, Joan is bored and unhappy, but aren't we all responsible for our own boredom to some degree? Witchcraft is merely the filter through which Joan finds her suburban existence tolerable.

In fact, some of the final images of the film imply that Joan has merely traded one trap for another. In her coven ritual, a red rope is

put around her neck, and she is dragged by it, as if on a leash. This sequence echoes the opening dream sequence, in which Jack leads Joan around on a leash. Yet in this case, despite the continued enslavement, Joan finds the bondage acceptable.

Also, the film closes with an echo of another early scene. Near the start of the picture, Joan is identified as “Jack’s wife.” At the end of the picture, she identifies herself as a “witch.” The label has changed, but has anything else? She still seeks attention in either regard and is still living in a society that does not value her. As long as Joan lacks the self-confidence to break free of the establishment mind-set for women that they should marry, have babies, stay at home, and be happy, she will be enslaved.

Jack’s Wife is really only a feminist picture in the sense that it acknowledges that women are treated as subservient in affluent, middle-class America. Joan’s therapist tells Joan that only she can imprison herself, but the audience senses immediately that his comments are off the mark. As Romero’s camera follows her from one emotionally empty task to another (a grocery trip, a stop at the dry cleaners), viewers realize the deck has been stacked against her. It is harder for her to find emotional fulfillment because her chores are repetitive and meaningless and her mate values her only for her ability to take care of them—not for any intrinsic value she brings to their pairing.

As one might guess from this review, *Jack’s Wife* is a rich, meaningful, and even important film. George Romero handles it well, and the movie is a strong glimpse of one woman’s quest for self-relevance in a society that makes her second to men. Yet, the film is overlong, and Romero overfilms scenes. The same points can be made with a degree of brevity. Though Romero is nothing less than a genius at forging meaning through editing, he lacks the discipline to “cut” his work down to an efficient length. Thus *Jack’s Wife* feels bloated. There are lots of good things in it, but they sometimes come too far apart. The art in editing films is push the good stuff as close together as possible, while removing the bad stuff in between. It is clear that Romero is still struggling with that process here. Also, some technical credits are barely adequate. The film’s sound is not mixed right, and background noises are too loud.

This may sound like nitpicking, but it is a real flaw when so much of the film depends on smart dialogue. The audience strains to hear Romero's witty words, instead of synthesizing their meaning and importance.

The stereotypical "horror" aspects of *Jack's Wife* really play second fiddle to the character study, but that's fine. When Romero does need to mine the imagery of nightmares, he is as adept as ever. When an intruder breaks into Joan's house and tries to rape her, Romero's frenetic cutting makes it memorable, and quite frightening. Even the look of the attacker, a masked, willowy creature in black, is unnerving.

Made on an exceedingly low budget, *Jack's Wife* is really worth seeking out. It is not Romero's best work, but it is a critical juncture between *Night of the Living Dead* and *Martin*. It shows consistency with his *oeuvre*, and has a lot on its mind. If one is into cerebral horror, there are few more interesting genre pictures.

Let's Scare Jessica to Death (1971) * * * 1½

Critical Reception

"With the exception of Zohra Lampert's subtle and knowledgeable performance, no one in the cast has enough substance even to be considered humanoid. And after the first reel, the vampires seem to have lost their bite."—Stanley Kanfer, *Time*: "Batgirl," September 20, 1971, page 74.

"Director John Hancock is to be congratulated for a multi-layered horror film with frightening visuals. There isn't much logic to the story, yet the overall effect is unsettling ... the film has a dream-like quality...."—John Stanley, *Creature Features Strikes Again*, 1994, page 226.

"...it tends to lose much sense of what kind of movie it is.... Among the actors only Miss Lampert develops a characterization. And although she is

beautiful and as always, breathlessly appealing, she projects a personality too forcefully complex for a role that requires only sympathetic passivity....”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*: “Hippie Vampire,” August 28, 1971, page 15.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Zohra Lampert (Jessica); Barton Heyman (Duncan); Kevin O'Connor (Woody); Gretchen Corbett (Girl); Alan Manson (Dorker); Mariclare Costello (Emily).

CREW: Paramount Pictures Presents *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*. *Directed by:* John Hancock. *Produced by:* Charles B. Moss, Jr. *Film Editor:* Murray Solomon. *Director of Photography:* Bob Baldwin. *Music:* Orville Stoeber. *Co-Producer:* William Badalato. *Written by:* Ralph Rose, Norman Jonas. *Assistant Editor:* Ginny Katz. *Assistant Camera:* Sal Guida. *Set Decorator:* Norman Kenneson. *Costume Designer:* Mariette Pinchart. *Gaffer:* Myron Odeguard. *Continuity:* Randa Haines. *Make-up:* Irvin Carlton. *Grip:* Melvin Noped. *Production Assistant:* Judith Spangler, Joanne Michels, Barbara Reynolds. *Sound:* Joe Ryan. *Electronic Music:* Walter Sean. *Color:* Deluxe. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: After recovering from a nervous breakdown, Jessica decides to start over. With her husband Duncan and their friend, Woody, in tow, Jessica embarks on a trip to rural Connecticut. En route to their new home, Jessica stops at a cemetery to take rubbings of two gravestones. There, she sees a woman in a pale dress beckoning her, and wonders if she has regained her sanity at all. After a ferry ride to a secluded island, Jess and her fellow travelers arrive at their new home—the old Bishop place. Again, Jessica questions her sanity when she imagines that someone is sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch.

Once inside the house, Duncan and Woody share Jessica's concern. They all spot a woman upstairs. There, they meet the beautiful Emily, a young "traveler" who has been squatting at the remote Connecticut home. Jessica takes a liking to Emily and asks her to spend the night, even though it is clear that Duncan is attracted to her. After dinner, the "groovy" Emily suggests a séance, and the others agree. Emily calls upon all those who have died in the house to give a sign of their presence. Terrified, Jessica soon hears whispers in the house. Later, while she combs the old attic for antiques, Jessica senses a dark shadow nearby. Even more disturbing, while out in the cove for a swim, Jessica feels a hand try to pull her down to the bottom, calling her name.

The next day, Jessica and Duncan head to the nearby town to sell off the antiques they have gathered. They find the odd local people—all strange old men—distinctly unfriendly. A bit further down the road Jessica and Duncan meet Dorker, the proprietor of an antique shop. He is hesitant to buy their goods because he knows they came from the old Bishop homestead. Apparently, there is a great deal of local superstition about the home now owned by Jessica and Duncan. In 1880, Abigail Bishop drowned in the cove on the eve of her wedding. Now myth suggests that Abigail still lives, and that she roams the idyllic countryside as some kind of vampire. Jessica is terrified by this story, especially because she found a wedding dress and a very sharp knife stowed away safely in a trunk in her attic...

On another day, Jessica takes a walk in the country, and is shocked to discover Dorker's dead body near a creek. Unfortunately, she is the only person who sees the corpse, and Emily, Duncan and Woody again suspect that she has not recovered from her nervous breakdown. Even weirder, Jessica again runs into the mute girl in the white dress, the one she saw at the graveyard. This girl tries to warn Jessica about something before she runs away.

Fearing the worst about his wife, Duncan suggests it may be time to return home to New York City. Jessica and Duncan then quarrel, and spend the night sleeping apart. In the middle of the night, Emily seduces Duncan and makes love to him. The following morning, Jessica finds that her pet mole has been murdered.

Upset, Jessica goes off by herself. In the attic, she sees a framed picture of the Bishop family, and notices that Abigail is a dead ringer for Emily. Emily brushes aside the resemblance, and suggests that Jessica go swimming in the cove with her. There, Emily tries to kill Jessica. Terrified, Jessica realizes that Emily is Abigail. Abigail chases Jessica to the house, where Jessica hides for many hours, awaiting Duncan's return from town. Meanwhile, Abigail seduces Woody too.

After some time, Jessica works up the courage to flee the house. She runs to town, but the men there all have strange wounds on their necks, and are resolutely unhelpful. When Jessica returns home, Duncan reappears. He takes her to bed, comforting her. As they prepare to make love, Jessica realizes that her husband bears the same strange slash-mark on his neck. When Jessica looks up from her bed, she sees all the old men of the town—a mob—staring at her. And, Abigail is there too. Abigail slices Jessica's neck, and starts to drink her blood. Fleeing the community of vampires, Jessica seeks Woody only to find him dead, drained of blood. Desperate, Jessica hops into a rowboat and escapes from the island of vampires. On the shore, Abigail and her army of servants watch her coldly.

Crying in a rowboat, Jessica wonders if she is really, truly insane, of if the strange events she has witnessed could possibly be true...

COMMENTARY: The bottom line is that horror movies are supposed to be scary. But how movies reach that common denominator is a matter of debate. In Hollywood today, many executives think CGI effects can scare the audience (witness the tepid remakes of *The Haunting* [1999] or *House on Haunted Hill* [1999]). Contrarily, Alfred Hitchcock believed that he could terrify audiences with misdirection, surprise, and shock (*à la Psycho*). *The Exorcist* (1973) worked so splendidly because William Friedkin adopted an almost documentary-style approach to the horrific material, making it feel “real” to involved audiences. Already in this text, it has been noted how lighting (*Daughters of Darkness*), or clever editing (*Jack's Wife*) can contribute to a successful, frightening film too.

But there is another way to scare. It is more difficult, and ultimately

more subjective, as it involves the auspices of texture, feeling and mood. *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* may be one of the best examples of this very complex approach. The film's story makes little sense if taken as a whole; there are few dramatic "action" scenes (save for one exquisite "jolt" early on), and even fewer special effects. Yet the film is, in the best sense of the word, creepy. It is a scary little film that gets under your nerves and puts you ill at ease almost instantly.

How is this mood achieved? It's not easy to dissect it, frankly. One might make mention of the brilliant cinematography, for one thing. The film is hazy at times, like a dream, and it is filled with gothic images. The beautiful opening shot reveals a fog settling over the still waters of a cove. The sun is orange and low in the apricot sky, forecasting night, and a sad woman (Jessica) sits alone in a canoe, a post-modern Lady of Shallotte. The villain is a porcelain woman in flowing white dress, a contemporary Rappaccini's daughter, who brings terror and death to anyone who gets too close.

On a simple level, Jessica's abandoned old house is an imposing bit of architecture, well filmed from multiple low angles to indicate menace. These visuals play on old dreads, but effective ones, and *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* is a lovely and even poetic horror film in a visual sense.

John Hancock has also taken special care to "hint" at rather than definitively show his most horrific moments. That's another trick for moody horror movies. Consider for a moment the impact of *The Blair Witch Project*. Almost nothing horrific is shown, but the cumulative effect of seeing the witch's icons and figures (which she leaves behind), the uncertainty of being lost, and the paranoia of the kids lost in the woods, combine to create a mood of abject terror. *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* selects a similar method. There's an unsettling moment in an attic when a shadowy figure shifts (in the foreground) while Jessica is seen in the background. This dark blur is never seen clearly. It is visible merely as black movement. What is it? Who is it? We don't know, but we're unnerved by its presence.

Similarly, the old men of the town are often referred to as vampires, as is Abigail, but these aren't the garden-variety cape-and-fangs sort. They're more like a mob of undead zombies, moving slowly,

strangely gnarled in their old age, and enigmatic in their purpose. Had Hancock desired to do so, he could have provided clarity about these specters, their nature, and their history. Instead, like the blur in the attic, he merely hints at what they are. A tried and true method of scaring audiences is to remove clarity from reality's equation. The audience starts to wonder, along with Jessica, if it has really seen or understood what is occurring.

Let's Scare Jessica to Death's macabre touches flow throughout the film. In particular, the film is obsessed with images of death. Jessica and her friends drive to her new life in Connecticut in a hearse, a vehicle of the dead. Jessica's hobby, gravestone rubbings, also brings to light a connection to death as she reads grave inscriptions that speak of life and joy, and decay. Hancock so carefully forges his atmosphere of fear that even the grave rubbings, blowing on a wall by night, seem terrifying. With silences and intervals of noise (like squawking chickens in a coop!), Hancock keeps the viewer unbalanced. It's a spooky, spooky film.

Then there's another trick: *whispering*. Everybody whispers in this film. Jessica calls upon the spirits of the dead to talk to her, and odd, evil whispering surrounds her. Many of Jessica's own interior monologues ("*look at the blood, Jessica, look at the blood!*") are whispered. If anyone seriously doubts that whispering is an effective way to raise goosebumps, this author suggests they check out *The Sixth Sense* (1999) as evidence. There is something immediate, impassioned and troubling about the mode of the whisper. It seems to be directed at the audience, as if it is a secret the viewer shouldn't know. Whatever the reason of its effectiveness, it adds to the general feeling of unease generated by this film.

Those seeking a linear, sensible horror show will no doubt find *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* a bit disappointing. It does not subscribe to any sense of reality most viewers are familiar with. Yet, and this is important, its decision to be inscrutable, enigmatic, and ambivalent echoes the film's central theme: Jessica's uncertain mental state. It's almost as if this film is seen through Jessica's eyes (an effect heightened by her frequent voice-overs). We might very well be in the mind of a crazy woman ... or a woman terrorized by something truly and deeply evil. It isn't clear, but it doesn't need to be.

Hancock's camera sees as if through Jessica's (possibly) mad eyes and the result is a very disturbing film.

New England Gothic—that's the mood of *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*. There's an ancient evil, a town with a dark secret, a struggle with sanity, and a coven of bloodthirsty men. What else could one want out of a horror movie? Director Hancock sets the mood, and viewers get to revel in it for 89 hypnotic minutes. This reviewer, for one, will take mood over CGI any day.

The Man Who Haunted Himself

Cast and Crew

CAST: Roger Moore (Pelham); Hildegard Neil (Eve); Alastair Mackenzie (Michael); Hugh Mackenzie (James); Thorley Walters (Bellamy); Anton Rodgers (Alexander); Olga Georges-Picot (Julie); Freddie Jones (Psychiatrist).

CREW: *Directed by:* Basil Dearden. *Written by:* Basil Dearden and Michael Ralph. *Music:* Michael Lewis. *Produced by:* Michael Ralph. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 94 minutes.

DETAILS: A pre-Bond Roger Moore headlines in this British-made thriller about a man who learns he as an exact duplicate, a Doppelgänger. Moore is supported ably by the fetching Hildegard Neil, but this is one bizarre movie.

The Mephisto Waltz (1971) * * ½

Critical Reception

“*Waltz* stands on its own as a sleek and scary piece of movie necromancy... Director Paul Wendkos has ... taken ... his title ... too literally. He seizes every available opportunity to dance his camera around, photographing from acrobatic angles and utilizing a full spectrum of weird color filters ... he succeeds

in achieving a good sense of clammy terror ... spooky enough to make you wonder just a little the next time you attend a piano recital.”—Jay Cocks, *Time*: “Spook The Piano Player,” May 3, 1971 page 89.

“...the year’s most expensively mounted ‘horror film’ and it will probably be the year’s most corrupt one. For its story ... not only centers upon satanism but also involves incest. Fortunately, it doesn’t make any sense.”—Eunice Sinkler, *Films in Review*, Volume XXII, May 1971, page 313.

“...a miserably infantile botch of occult suspense.... The picture ... is terrible. Style and subtlety might have done the trick.... But this shrill, heavy-handed exercise only makes us appreciate *Rosemary’s Baby* all over again.”—Howard Thompson, *New York Times*, April 10, 1971.

“...generates an effective atmosphere of evil and makes a satisfying, eerie thriller.... Wendkos mistakes a frenetic camera for genuine style.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 96.

Cast & Credits

CAST: Alan Alda (Myles Clarkson); Jacqueline Bisset (Paula Clarkson); Barbara Perkins (Roxanne DeLancey); Brad Dillman (Bill Delancey); William Windom (Dr. West); Kathleen Widdoes (Maggie West); Pamelyn Ferdin (Abby Clarkson); Curt Jurgens (Duncan Ely); Curt Lowens, Gregory Morton, Janee Michelle, Illyan Chauvin, Khigh Dhilegh, Alberto Morin, Barry Kroeger, Terence Scammell.

CREW: 20th Century–Fox Presents a Quinn Martin Production, *The Mephisto Waltz*. *Music:* Jerry

Goldsmith. *The Mephisto Waltz* by Liszt performed by: Jakob Gimpel. *Costumes*: Moss Mabry. *Director of Photography*: William W. Spencer. *Art Direction*: Richard Y. Haman. *Film Editor*: Richard Brockway. *Set Decorator*: Walter M. Scott, Raphael Bretton. *Property Master*: Sidney Greenwood. *Special Photographic Effects*: Howard A. Anderson Co. *Main Title*: Phill Norman. *Unit Production Manager*: William Eckhardt. *Assistant Director*: David Hall. *Orchestration*: Arthur Morton. *Camera Operator*: Gene Evans. *Sound Supervisor*: John A. Bonner. *Sound Mixer*: Don J. Bassman. *Make-up Supervisor*: Joe DiBella. *Hairstylist*: Pat Abbott. *Color*: DeLuxe. *Associate Producer*: Arthur Fellows. *Screenplay*: Ben Maddow. *Based on the Novel by*: Fred Mustard Stewart. *Produced by*: Quinn Martin. *Directed by*: Paul Wendkos. Produced by QM Productions. Released by 20th Century-Fox. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 109 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: The famous (and arrogant) pianist Duncan Ely summons writer and amateur musician Myles Clarkson to his palatial home to grant him an interview. The aged Ely lives with his beautiful daughter, Roxanne, and immediately finds himself fascinated with Myles ... particularly his "pianist's" hands. After Roxanne affirms that she also approves of Myles, Duncan's haughty tone softens and he takes the impressed Clarkson under his wing. Duncan encourages him to give up writing and return to his first love, the piano, despite the fact Myles was not well received by the critics after his debut concert.

Clarkson's beautiful wife, Paula, instantly dislikes the eccentric old Ely, as well as the seductive Roxanne. She also finds herself less than thrilled when compelled by Myles to attend Duncan's raucous New Year's Eve party. The party turns out to be a wild bacchanalia, and Paula seeks solace from the noise and debauched activity in Duncan's private study. There, she finds evidence (a spell book and a strange vial of blue liquid) that Duncan is actually a devil worshiper.

Over Paula's objections, Myles spends increasingly more time with Ely and Roxanne. Myles confides to Paula that Duncan is dying of leukemia, and Paula softens her stance against the older man for a time. One night, Myles agrees to sit for Roxanne, an aspiring artist, and she makes a plaster life-mask of the young musician to hang on the wall in Duncan's study. Though Myles is unaware of it, this mask is a crucial piece of a diabolical satanic ritual. As Duncan lies dying in his bed of disease, Roxanne conducts a ritual which implants the old man's immortal soul into Myles' young, healthy body ... presumably sending Clarkson's soul to some kind of oblivion or Hell. After Duncan's physical body has expired, the "transplanted" Ely starts to live a new life inside Myles.

Ely's will bequeaths the Clarksons one hundred thousand dollars as well as a Steinway piano. And, Ely leaves his murderous dog, Robin, to Paula's daughter, Abby. Swayed by the money, and Myles' new amorous qualities, Paula fails to notice at first that her husband has changed. However, she grows increasingly unhappy and jealous when Myles continues to spend time with Roxanne. One day, Paula hears Myles playing the piano and is amazed that he is suddenly a brilliant musician ... every bit the equal of Duncan Ely. Also impressed, Roxanne arranges for Myles to take over Duncan's concert schedule.

Paula finds herself increasingly drawn to Myles, astounded by his newfound sexual prowess and appetites. She confides in a friend, Maggie, that he has the appetite of three men, and that she feels unfaithful making love to him because he is so different ... and so good. Even as Paula enjoys this "perk" of marriage, she experiences a terrible nightmare in which Ely kills her daughter Abby, telling Paula that it is all part of the bargain. When Paula awakens from the terrible dream, she finds that Abby really is sick. Myles and Paula rush Abby to the hospital, but the young girl dies soon after their arrival there. Paula now believes that Roxanne and Duncan somehow made a bargain with the Devil to steal Myles' body. In return, she thinks, they had to give the Devil a prize: Abby's life. Terrified, Paula seeks a rendezvous with Roxanne's ex-husband, an attorney named Delancey. He affirms that Duncan and Roxanne are devil worshipers, but does not believe they have any real powers beyond those of suggestion. Before long, Delancey dies too (with a

blotch of mysterious blue fluid on his head) and Paula becomes convinced that she will be the next victim.

When Paula narrowly survives a car accident, she is spurred to action. While Myles is in San Francisco at a concert with Roxanne, Paula visits the Ely estate and steals the devil's prayer book and special blue oil used for a satanic ritual. Becoming a Satanist herself, Paula arranges for a switcheroo that will bring her new, and wonderful, lover, Duncan, back to her forever. Embracing evil, Paula initiates the ritual, and switches bodies with Roxanne. Roxanne's soul is cast to oblivion in Paula's vacated corpse, and now Paula, alive in Roxanne's body, is free to enjoy the wonderful sexual pleasures dispensed by Duncan.

COMMENTARY: Here's a movie that starts ambitiously as a meditation on old age and creative failure, but then ends off-message, focusing on one woman's quest for good sex at the expense of her daughter's life and her husband's soul. The final act seems not only exploitative, but out of character, for star Jacqueline Bisset had hitherto given a solid, believable performance as a woman in the center of a satanic conspiracy. Thus *The Mephisto Waltz* is an engaging, well-directed, competently acted horror film that, simply put, springs a leak in the final act.

The opening sections of the film are powerful, interesting, and a metaphor for a situation many young artists, whether musicians, writers or painters, have faced. Specifically, the movie focuses on a creative genius (Duncan Ely) who covets his success as an artist (a pianist). Yet, he is dying, so he steals the thunder of the next generation—literally. He possesses the body of Clarkson, basically stealing Clarkson's talents. This is not an uncommon situation in Hollywood (or anywhere where creativity is at a premium, truthfully). The old power, fortified by a powerful reputation, absconds with the talents of the younger generation, which is trying to establish itself and is eager to please. *The Mephisto Waltz* takes that concept literally, with the old talent literally stealing the life of the young talent, yet the metaphor is plain. The old don't want to give up their grip on fame or fortune, and so resort to theft to remain in the public eye. As for the young, they are so desperate to do important work, to be known, that they settle for

apprenticeships that don't always favor their best long-term interests. It's a great relationship to explore in a horror movie.

Wendkos' film explores this conceit with some really nice visual touches. Hands seem to be a leitmotif, as images of hands are repeated throughout the film. During the opening credits, disembodied hands pop off a candle flame, and the camera examines them. Later, Ely notes of Clarkson that "hands like" his are "one in a hundred thousand." For a pianist, hands are the focal point of talent, and *The Mephisto Waltz* obsesses on them. Hands, also, play a part in sexual satisfaction no doubt, and the film makes quite clear that Ely has the hands of an artist in more ways than one. The repetition of "hand" imagery ties much of the film together, as does the piano music, which underscores various important moments.

The "horror" of the film is also handled well. During the satanic ritual which robs Clarkson of life, Wendkos' camera adopts a high angle, and the edges of the frame are soft, blurred, as if a third party (possibly devilish) is watching it all dispassionately from a distance ... not quite inside our reality. Though all films come to audiences from a third-person perspective, this sequence, this series of shots, feels as if events are being watched from the edge of existence, through eyes not quite our own. It is a solid choice, and well executed.

Even scene transitions in *The Mephisto Waltz* are powerfully handled. The film is erotically charged, and scene transitions forge a link between sex and darkness. Miles and Paula make love ... and then the film cuts to that creepy party at the Ely estate. Paula and Miles make love, and then the film cuts to a funeral, and so on. *The Mephisto Waltz* seems to be linking sex and death in a visual fashion.

The problem is that Alda and Bisset are not just two randy lovers screwing around. The film takes special pains to establish them as a couple in love. In their first scene together they are in bed and the dialogue establishes their intimacy through romantic banter. Alda is especially effective in these early scenes, which establish a quirky, attractive personality with very little screentime. Bisset too creates an endearing individual who is concerned for her husband. They

are obviously in love, and they adore their child, Abby. Yet, for the final act of the film to work, one must believe that Paula would willingly accept the death of her daughter and husband just so she can continue to experience good sex with Ely. That's just too hard to swallow. Had the film established Bisset's character as a libidinous, unfaithful wife given to sexual infidelity, one might understand her willingness to accept evil into her life for such passion.

The Mephisto Waltz takes a decidedly wrong turn when it loses track of its core relationship: that between Paula and her husband. "I want Miles ... whoever he ... just once more." Bisset's character enthuses, blown over by Ely's sexual prowess. In fact, he is so good in bed that Paula becomes a Satanist, and switches bodies with Roxanne just to get him. That decision is way out of character with the Paula of the rest of the film, and leaves one shocked. It's an ending out of leftfield. In a sense, Wendkos is sabotaged by his performers: they do such a good job of creating intimacy on screen that one never believes that Paula would give up her child and her husband (and her religious convictions, and her very soul) for terrific sex. Asking the audience to accept that unbelievable development is worse than asking it to believe in body switches, devilish dogs, and any other horror aspect of the script. This is so stylish, so interesting a film that one can merely gasp at the wrong turn it takes at its denouement. *The Mephisto Waltz* could hit some great notes, but the script has a tin ear.

***Night of Dark Shadows* (1971) ***

Critical Reception

"...the script ... depends a good deal on visual effects that aren't particularly effective.... Dan Curtis ... hasn't given his cast much to work with.... The attraction of this dour adventure is Lyndhurst, the ... mansion ... where the film was shot.... The somber story, ... however, is strictly for the low rent district."—A. H. Weiler, *New York Times*, October 14, 1971.

Cast & Crew

CAST: David Selby (Quentin Collins/ Charles Collins); Grayson Hall (Carlotta Drake/Sarah Castle); Lara Parker (Angelique Collins); John Karlen (Alex Jenkins); Nancy Barrett (Clair Jenkins); James Storm (Gerard Styles); Thayer David (Reverend Strack); Christopher Pennock (Gabriel Collins); Diana Millay (Laura Collins); Kate Jackson (Tracy Collins); Monica Rich (Young Sarah Castle); Clarice Blackburn (Mrs. Castle).

CREW: Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Presents a Dan Curtis Production, *Night of Dark Shadows*. *Assistant Director:* Stanley Panesoff. *Assistant Producer:* Robert Singer. *Director of Photography:* Richard Shore. *Production Supervisor and Associate Producer:* George Goodman. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Robert Cobert. *Screenplay:* Sam Hall. *Story:* Sam Hall and Dan Curtis. *Produced and Directed by:* Dan Curtis. *Film Editor:* Charles Goldsmith. *Assistant Editor:* Aviva Slesin. *Camera Operator:* Ronald Lautore. *Casting:* Linda Otto. *Production Assistant:* William Schwartz. *Sound:* John Bolz, Al Gramaglia. *Wardrobe Designer:* Domingo Rodriguez. *Make-up:* Reginald Tackley. *Hair dresser:* Edith Tilles. *Stunt Coordinator:* Alex Stevens. *Titles:* The Optical House. *Technical Adviser:* Hans Holzer. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Quentin Collins and his wife Tracy move into the abandoned Collinswood Estate in Collins Port, Maine. There, they meet the odd housekeeper, Carlotta Drake, who seems to know more about the home's history than she lets on. Once moved in, Quentin, a painter, almost immediately starts to dream about a beautiful blonde woman named Angelique Collins, who was hanged as a witch 150 years ago and was a former tenant of the estate. While riding his horse on the land, Quentin experiences a vision of Angelique's funeral and sees a little girl, Sarah Castle, peering out of the Collinswood house windows.

Friends of Tracy and Quentin, Clair and Alex Jenkins, come to visit Collinsport and Quentin reveals that he has been imagining things since his arrival. Later, he experiences a strong sense of *déjà vu* when he visits the Tower Room, a painting studio at the top of the house. In his new studio, Quentin unearths a painting of Angelique and imagines that he is Charles Collins, a painter who had a lustful affair with the witch in centuries past. Consumed with this vision, Quentin beats up the groundskeeper, Gerard, whom he somehow mistakes for the brother of Charles and the very man responsible for Angelique's death so many years ago.

The next day, Alex Jenkins spots a mysterious woman when patrolling the grounds, and is nearly killed by falling glass panes in an old greenhouse. At the same time, Quentin decides not to paint in the Tower Room, feeling that it may be responsible for his odd behavior. This decision irritates Carlotta Drake, who claims that she is the reincarnation of Sarah Castle, the little girl from a century and a half ago who has an eternal love and regard for Angelique. Worse, Carlotta expresses the belief that Quentin is the reincarnation of Charles and that Angelique has been waiting for him. A witch during her life, Angelique is powerful even in death, and Carlotta warns Quentin that Tracy should leave the house lest she face Angelique's wrath. Quentin ignores the advice and remains in the home with Tracy. He resumes work in the Tower Room and is soon overcome by the personality of Charles Collins.

Tracy visits Quentin's painting studio while he is away in town and discovers his newest painting—a portrait of Quentin bringing a sacrifice in the form of a dead Tracy to a lounging Angelique. Meanwhile, Alex and Clair have uncovered another painting that reveals Quentin as a dead-ringer for Charles Collins. They race to save Tracy and Quentin, but find that Quentin has tried to drown Tracy in the abandoned pool house. Tracy survives the encounter, and Quentin returns to normality. Then, all hell breaks loose as the groundskeeper, Gerard, tries to kill Tracy and Quentin for some wrong committed in a past life. Gerard is killed in hand-to-hand battle, and Quentin realizes that Angelique will always be a part of his spirit unless he kills Carlotta, who keeps the evil ghost alive with her undying “love.” Carlotta jumps from the roof of the Collinswood estate rather than face capture, and dies.

Alex, Clair, Tracy and Quentin decide to flee Collinswood, but Angelique's spirit is still a presence to be reckoned with. When Quentin goes inside the haunted home to gather his painting supplies, a dark figure strikes again.

COMMENTARY: One might think it would be difficult to create a less interesting film than 1970's *House of Dark Shadows*, which recycled the "Barnabas" plot of the famous TV soap opera. One would be wrong. The sequel to that film, *Night of Dark Shadows*, is a slow-paced, badly written regurgitation of the program's lesser material, the "B" storyline. Yet, oddly, this sub-par material, once an integral part of Barnabas's story, makes nary a mention of that vampire. It is a stand-alone adventure that makes only a modicum of sense, and seems to have no real connection to the TV series.

The plot of *Night of Dark Shadows* consists of Quentin Collins' discovery of a previous life via dreams and visions. These phantasms are told without thrills or jolts, and are pretty repetitive. Damningly, the dreams always convey relevant information at exactly the right time. In fact, all these characters, from Quentin to Carlotta Drake, remember an awful lot as reincarnated souls, so much so that it is hard to understand why their souls returned with "new" names in the next life at all. As for Carlotta, she's that hoary cliché, the strange housekeeper, but even worse she exists in this film solely as a convenient mouthpiece for exposition. Through a reincarnated Sarah Castle, she remembers things precisely enough to explain the plot to a befuddled Quentin.

Actually, all the characters are pretty weak, at the whim of a confusing story. Quentin seems to be bipolar, insisting one moment that he loves Tracy, while at the next moment trying to kill her. There is no link or transition between these two approaches, and the result is distancing. The audience never feels it knows Quentin, and thus does not really care about his plight. The supernatural mechanisms that apparently seize control of him remain vague, and it is impossible to tell when he is himself, or when he is possessed. Kate Jackson's Tracy isn't delineated in terms much better. She is a submissive character that lets Quentin's strange behavior go unquestioned for far too long. The fallacy of haunted house movies is that the characters must remain in the house, the place of danger,

beyond all reason and logic. That is nowhere more obvious than in *Night of Dark Shadows*. It is blatantly obvious to everybody that Tracy and Quentin just need to get in their car and drive away ... but they never do.

And Gerard the groundskeeper? He's another character in service of a bad plot. He goes crazy at the right time to facilitate two necessary action scenes (a car chase and a fist fight). Who is he? Why is he nuts? Who knows! He's there only to present a physical conflict, because the film could not, apparently, afford a climax featuring a ghost.

Which brings us to Angelique. In the TV series, she was the witch who damned Barnabas to his life of vampirism. He had scorned her, and that was her revenge. None of that information appears in *Night of Dark Shadows*, and Angelique is just a ghost haunting a house with little rhyme or reason. She is not made terrifying by the low-tech, primitive opticals the film employs, and is hardly interesting at all. Fans of the TV series should have been outraged.

Night of Dark Shadows is a boring movie, with a few effective moments. The scene in the dilapidated greenhouse, buffeted by wind, works rather well. The use of Lyndhurst as a Gothic mansion is inspired. And, the climactic car chase is shot ably and is professionally edited, though this is a horror movie, not *The French Connection*. In the end, this film is a staggering disappointment because it is uninteresting, nonsensical, confusing, and a rip-off of the TV series. Why call this film *Dark Shadows*, when it is so unlike the TV show, and Barnabas is nowhere to be found? No wonder this sequel killed the franchise. That said, look for the climax of *Night of Dark Shadows* to recur in Dan Curtis's far superior 1976 outing, *Burnt Offerings*.

LEGACY: In January of 2001, *Wicked* magazine reported that director Dan Curtis' cut of *Night of Dark Shadows*, which apparently runs over two hours, would be released on a special edition DVD. According to Curtis, the film was cut to 90 minutes against his will for theatrical release.

The Night Visitor (1971) * * *

Critical Reception

“As a tense how-was-it-done, *The Night Visitor* is an uncommonly fascinating film ... the motivations for all the machinations and Gothic horrors are merely touched on and hinted at ... in the convoluted goings-on. But the methods of madness are the thing here ... a captivating, moody and scenic thriller.”—A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, February 11, 1971.

“It’s incredible that any film with a cast which includes Max Von Sydow, Liv Ullmann, Per Oscarsson and Trevor Howard could be as bad as *The Night Visitor*. If there were ever proof that talented actors cannot save a bad script—it is here. Nor save a mediocre director (Laslo Benedek). Nor an addled producer (Mel Ferrer).”—Gloria Ives, *Films in Review*, Volume XII, Number 3, March 1971, page 175.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Trevor Howard (Inspector); Liv Ullmann (Ester Jenks); Per Oscarsson (Dr. Anton Jenks); Max Von Sydow (Salem); Andrew Keir (Dr. Kemp); Jim Kennedy (Carl); Arthur Hewlett (Pop); Hanne Bork (Emmie); Gretchen Franklin (Mrs. Hansen); Rupert Davies (Mr. Clemens); Bjorn Watt-Booksen (Mr. Torens); Lotte Freddie (Britt Torens); Erik Kuhnau (Police Doctor).

CREW: Sidney Glazier Presents a Hemisphere Production, *The Night Visitor*. *Production Manager:* Katinka Farago. *Assistant to Director:* Pamela Davies. *Camera Operator:* Peter Klitgard. *Second Mixer:* Robert Allen. *Dubbing Mixer:* Hugh Strain. *Sound Editor:* Ian Fuller. *Production Designer:* P.A. Lundgren. *Art Director:* Viggo Bentzon. *Props:* Karen Bentzon. *Make-up:* Bengt Ottekil, Ruth Mahler.

Production Secretary: Romy Watt Torrance. *Film Editor:* Bill Blunden. *Director of Photography:* Henning Kirstiansen. *Music:* Henry Mancini. *Screenplay:* Guy Elmes. *Based on an Original Story by:* Sam Roeca. *Produced by:* Mel Ferrer. *Directed by:* Laslo Benedek. Filmed Entirely on Location in Denmark and Sweden and at Asa and Laterna Studios, Copenhagen. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 102 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In frozen Sweden, a farmer named Salem has been termed “criminally insane” and incarcerated at an impregnable, inescapable mental asylum. Salem’s crime was the axe-murder of a farmhand, but in truth Salem was framed in a devious, wide-ranging conspiracy. His sister, Ester Jenks, and her husband, Dr. Anton Jenks, actually murdered the farmhand themselves, and framed Salem for the crime so that they, not Salem, could control the financial future of the farm. Salem’s alibi in the case was Britt Torens, a young lover he was with when the farmhand was killed. Unfortunately, Britt did not speak up in court to clear Salem, instead protecting her own virginal reputation at the cost of his freedom. Damningly, even Salem’s lawyer, Mr. Clemens, was involved in the cover-up. Without Salem’s permission, Clemens changed his client’s plea, and thereby assured that Salem would not go to prison but rather to an insane asylum where there was no possibility of parole.

For two long years, Salem has stewed in his tiny cell and plotted how to wreak revenge against those who conspired against him. Using a mixture of psychological warfare and death-defying athletics, Salem manages to escape from the fortress-like asylum each night and turn the tables on his many accusers and betrayers. He kills Britt Torens, and implicates Jenks in her death. When the police become involved, they immediately question both Jenks and Salem, but the inspector quickly comes to realize that Salem could not possibly escape from the well-fortified asylum to commit murder. And, even if he did so, why would he then return to his cell each night?

Salem’s plan, which requires split-second timing, then frames Anton

Jenks in a new series of murders, including the chopping death of his very own wife, Ester ... who implicated him to the police shortly before her death.

All of Salem's well-laid plans seem to be working quite well, conquering harsh weather, personal loyalties, and even timing. However, there is one loose cannon in Salem's revenge scenario. Dr. Jenks and his late wife Ester own a parrot ... a parrot with knowledge of their crimes, as well as an extensive vocabulary. During Salem's many night visits to the family farm to enact his plan, the bird is inadvertently freed from its cage. Now that Jenks has been framed for all the murders and Salem is to be freed, found innocent of the crime he was charged with, this final wild card is played in a surprising way.

COMMENTARY: With a cold, psychologically frigid setting and the presence of Max Von Sydow in the lead role, *The Night Visitor* looks a lot like an Ingmar Bergman picture. Yet, it is more immediately accessible a film than, say, *Persona*, and it focuses not so much on inner conflict as it does on action. This is Bergman re-imagined as action director, and it works rather well.

The film is built like a puzzle box. How does the protagonist, Salem, escape from the asylum each night? How does he pass through the bars in the hallway outside his room? How does he survive the fall to the courtyard 60 feet below his cell? How does he commit his perfect, but bloody crimes? Those are the questions that *The Night Visitor* concerns itself with, and that narrow focus makes for a compelling film that is equal parts crime caper and suspense film. There's a Hitchcockian precision to the set-up here, and one has to admire director Laslo Benedek for his detail-minded helming. Benedek builds his movie brilliantly.

The picture opens with Salem free and on the loose in the icy terrain (garbed only in his underwear, no less), so the audience is immediately aware that he is escaping each night. Then, Benedek follows a police inspector who demonstrates, rather compellingly, that such an escape is absolutely impossible. Each impediment, from the asylum's stone gray walls of great height, and the impassible prison bars, to the locked cell, is highlighted, tested and reinforced. Finally, after establishing both Salem's freedom and the

utter impossibility of that freedom, Benedek depicts precisely how the escape is managed. Amazingly, there are no tricks in this final portion of the movie. The audience is not asked to suspend disbelief, or accept a physical impossibility (like the mine car jump in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [1985] or the bus freeway jump in *Speed* [1994]). Instead, the film thoughtfully reasons out every impediment in reasonable and logical fashion, and Salem's escape is revealed to be part psychology (the tricking of inmates and guards), part crafty theft (there are hidden tools to use, such as keys), and, finally, and most harrowingly, physical prowess. In this last regard, the film is truly impressive as Max Von Sydow is seen scaling trees and walls, and racing from one part of his plan to another. As methodical, well-conceived action flick, *The Night Visitor* is no less than brilliant.

An impossible escape in a bleak, forbidding terrain is the centerpiece of *The Night Visitor*, but the film is also interesting in the way that it asks the audience to first perceive Salem as a resourceful hero, a framed man, and then, finally as something of a monster. He is, after all, a murderer. Despite this fact, the audience is with him all the way, since his enemies, the conspirators, all richly deserve their fate. The final third of the film is an exercise in suspense as Salem crosses one hurdle after another in an attempt to get back to his asylum cell before the inspector discovers he has escaped. Of course, as one might expect, there is a final twist that exposes Salem, but how and why that twist occurs makes for a fun, heart-pounding conclusion.

Probably the only flaw in this amazing caper is that (at least in the U.S.) a competent police inspector would have men stationed all over the asylum grounds, just in case Salem was somehow escaping. That doesn't happen here, but that's a very minor quibble with a well-thought-out film. For its splendid action scenes (such as Sydow swinging down a high exterior wall), and its thoughtful construction of the perfect crime, *The Night Visitor* is a welcome guest in the VCR anytime.

***The Omega Man* (1971) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...The film is best in its middle-third ... peppered with some sharp, even amusing dialogue, the story temporarily shelves the heavy allegory and slips into good, slam-bang suspense. But it doesn't last. And the climax is as florid and phony as it can be....”—Howard Thompson, *New York Times*, August 14, 1971, page 13.

“This version has a large budget; unfortunately it also has uninspired direction, a script that strays too far from its source material, and a dull and stodgy performance from Heston. A totally wasted opportunity.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 108.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Charlton Heston (Colonel Robert Neville); Anthony Zerbe (Matthias); Rosalind Cash (Lisa); Paul Koslo (Dutch); Lincoln Kilpatrick (Brother Zachary); Eric Laneuville (Richie); Jill Giraldi (Little Girl); Anna Aries (Woman in Cemetery Crypt); Brian Tochi (Tommy); DeVeren Bookwalter, John Dierkes, Monika Henreid, Linda Redfearn, Forrest Wood (Family Members).

CREW: Warner Brothers Presents a Walter Seltzer Production, *The Omega Man*. *Director of Photography:* Russell Metty. *Art Director:* Arthur Loel, Walter M. Simonds. *Set Decoration:* Donald Roberts. *Film Editor:* William Ziegler. *Unit Production Manager:* Frank Baur. *Music:* Ron Grainer. *Action Coordinator:* Joe Cannutt. *Sound:* Bob Martin. *Costumer:* Margo Baxley. *Make-up:* Gordon Bau. *Screenplay:* John William and Joyce H. Corrington. *Based on the Novel by:* Richard Matheson. *Producer:* Walter Seltzer. *Director:* Boris Sagal. *Filmed in* Panavision and in Technicolor. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 98 minutes.

“Our basic decision to demythologize the story was, I think, a good one. Maybe it wasn’t—maybe we should have left the vampires in. But somehow, when you’re doing a last man on Earth story that involves all kinds of scientific plausibility, it seemed that vampires would not fit very well.... Instead we tried to render the spooks in scientific terms, with a blood disease and albinism and photophobia and all”⁸.—Charlton Heston, star of *The Omega Man* (1971), on the differences between Matheson’s source material and the finished film.

SYNOPSIS: In March of 1975, a biological plague wipes out the vast majority of mankind, leaving only one man alive, Colonel Robert Neville. By 1977, the lonely Neville is locked in a life-and-death struggle with a “new world order”: a race of neo-luddite, albino mutants, sick with the plague themselves, who are bent on destroying Neville and all evidence of mankind’s technological civilization. Calling itself the “Family,” these mutants are led by a former TV news anchorman, Matthias. Matthias has a special hatred for Neville, as Neville was part of the military establishment that contributed to the downfall of humanity.

Living a life of isolation, Neville spends his nights holed up in his museum-like penthouse apartment, and his days attempting to exterminate the light-sensitive, homicidal mutants in their nests. One night, Neville returns home late and narrowly avoids a trap set by the Family. Neville survives the attack, and recalls how he came to be in this situation. When the plague came, Neville injected himself with an experimental vaccine. This vaccine now keeps him immune from the disease and courses through his blood, but it also isolates him from the undead creatures of Los Angeles.

While out on the city one day attempting to find the hideout of Matthias, Neville spots a fellow survivor, the beautiful African-American woman named Lisa. When Neville is captured by Matthias and brought to a sports arena to be burned at the stake, Lisa rescues him with the help of a young former med student named Dutch.

Once free of the Family, Lisa, Dutch and Neville flee the city, and Neville is introduced to an encampment of seemingly normal children. In truth, the children, Lisa, and Dutch are all living on borrowed time. Because they are not immune, the plague will soon transform them into albino mutants. In fact, Lisa's own younger brother, Richie, is going through that very process. Realizing his blood may carry the means to save his fellow humans, Neville tends to Richie. With Lisa and Dutch, Neville takes the boy back to his apartment laboratory in the city. There, he develops a serum from his blood and injects Richie with it. Meanwhile, Neville and Lisa become romantically attached. Before they can consummate their relationship, Neville's apartment generator fails, plunging the apartment into darkness. Thinking the humans to be easy-pickings, Matthias orders an attack. Brother Zachary, a Family member who wants Neville dead at any cost, ascends the exterior wall of Neville's building. Neville manages to re-start his generator, and kill Zachary, just in time.

With Richie on the mend, Lisa, Dutch and Neville plot to leave the city permanently. Lisa heads out to gather supplies by day, while Neville makes more serum from his blood. A healthy Richie is troubled by Neville's attitude about the "Family." He wants to save Matthias and his people using the serum, much the way he was saved. Neville refuses to help, calling the mutants "vermin." Without Neville's knowledge or consent, Richie visits Matthias and the Family at their headquarters in a courthouse. There, he is captured and murdered. At the same time, the deadly plague takes hold of Lisa, turning her into an albino, homicidal mutant. When Neville fails to save Richie, he returns to his apartment and is led into a trap by Lisa. Matthias and his people smash and destroy all of Neville's art and artifacts, and plot to kill him. Neville manages to escape with the last vial of his precious blood serum, and Lisa. However, he does not get far. In the courtyard below his apartment, Neville is killed when Matthias hurls a spear through his chest.

Daylight comes, and Dutch and the children find Neville dead in the courtyard, crucified in the position of Christ, on a strange work of modern art. With Neville's precious blood serum, Dutch resolves to restore Lisa to health, and to get the children to safety. One of the children, a little girl, wonders if Neville was "God."



“From my cold, dead hands...” A heavily armed Neville (Charlton Heston) searches for the “Family” in *The Omega Man* (1971).

COMMENTARY: Charlton Heston is legend. To children who grew up in the 1970s, he is neither the “religious” figure of *The Ten Commandments*, nor the 1990s NRA hawk (“From my cold, dead hands...”). Instead, he is the ultimate science-fiction anti-hero, the best “bad-ass” in the business. In *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), *The Omega Man* (1971), and *Soylent Green* (1973)—all rerun continually on WABC New York’s 4:30 Movie—Heston played humanity’s reluctant defender, an outsider standing against a new social order whether it be simian, mutant, albino, or even cannibal. Heston seems perfect for this role, and all these films benefited enormously from his presence. As Pauline Kael once observed of the Academy Award-winning actor (in relation to *Planet of the Apes*):

Physically, Heston, with his perfect, lean hipped, powerful body, is a god-like hero, built for strength, he’s an archetype of what makes Americans win.

He doesn't play nice guy; he's harsh and hostile, self-centered and hot-tempered. Yet we don't hate him, because he's so magnetically strong; he represents American power—the physical attraction and admiration one feels toward the beauty of strength as well as the moral revulsion one feels toward the ugliness of violence.... He is the perfect American Adam to work off some American guilt feelings or self hatred on....⁹.

The same could very well be said of Heston's role in *The Omega Man*, a film that once again portrays the actor as a flawed messiah, a symbol of both American virtue and American arrogance. For even though his blood will save humanity, Heston is seen in the film as a right-wing ideologue, a closet racist who refers to his enemy as "vermin," non-humans to be exterminated with extreme prejudice. It's true he has a relationship with an African-American woman in the film, but his character, Neville is resolutely incapable of seeing the whiter-than-white family members as anything other than monsters. The intense dislike is mirrored by the Family, a "race" that views Heston's Neville in similarly hateful terms. But the casting of Heston is a masterstroke because he represents so many things. He's comfortable as a religious messiah (à la *The Ten Commandments*), a man alone in a topsy-turvy world (*Planet of the Apes*), and a flawed outsider trying to right a system he is not a part of (*Touch of Evil* [1958]). In a movie where the plot pits one man against a society (and usually a corrupt one), it is important that "the man" be strong, powerful, and charismatic. Heston fits the bill. There's no doubt that the presence of this 1970s science fiction icon enhances *The Omega Man*.

The film also benefits from the fact that the set-up of the picture is a primal male fantasy. Every guy wants to be the last man on Earth so he can drive the fast cars, carry the baddest guns, wear the coolest clothes, live in the best house, and romance a hot woman—who, because of her limited options, sees him as powerful and worthwhile. Though the film attempts to play against this fantasy with its themes of isolation and racial division, who can truthfully deny that such an existence fulfills every male's innate desire to be a hero? You get to save the world, your blood is considered

precious, and when you die, you become a messiah figure, remembered for generations. It may not make a lot of sense, and it certainly isn't admirable, but *The Omega Man* plays into the hero complex that drives so many men.

But beyond the iconic presence of Charlton Heston and the hero complex set-up of the film, *The Omega Man* succeeds in other ways. The earliest sequence of the film, as Neville's car speeds through an empty city, a metal valley of sorts, is very effectively shot. These scenes were lensed in a sleeping L.A. during the early morning hours before and around dawn, and the feeling of emptiness is authentic, and a little scary. It *feels* like a dead world. And the music, courtesy of Ron Grainer (*The Prisoner*) also lends the picture a melancholy but groovy 1970s mood. There's a jaunty, militant feel to the music of *The Prisoner*, a show about a man's psychological and physical imprisonment, and that same tone is generated here. Neville is every bit as much a prisoner as Patrick McGoochan was: alone and unable to escape a village that is, perhaps, of his own making. Good production values, coupled with some nice stylistic camerawork (such as the hand-held shaky material when the plague attacks passersby on the street), make this film nothing less than a guilty pleasure.

Why a *guilty* pleasure? Well, scribe Richard Matheson might well tell you that this film significantly changes the details of his book, *I Am Legend*. Secondly, *The Omega Man* much less meaningfully deals with the idea of a new social order than did George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (also inspired by Matheson's book, no doubt). In that picture, the tenets of western, Christian society had to be cast off to survive in a world of the ghouls. There was no time for funerals, family relationships disintegrated once a brother or daughter became undead, and man found himself sheltered in a 20th century cave, helpless before a mob usurper who controlled the outdoors and the night. Rather empty in comparison, *The Omega Man* settles for action and romance, and some shallow commentary about race warfare. It should be an infinitely more meaningful film. If this truly is a passing of the guard, then shouldn't the film also reveal Neville from the perspective of the new order? Like the last dinosaur in an age dominated by rodents, he is a curiosity, but also an outlier, a symbol of the past. All those things could have been

explored outside the confines of “us vs. them” physical conflict or action set pieces.

The film’s heavy-handed dialogue sometimes feels forced, such as Richie’s comment of idealistic pacifism that “at times,” Neville scares him more than “Matthias does.” The film never legitimately tackles that fact, that Neville isn’t a particularly nice guy, and that, as part of the military establishment, he does bear a measure of guilt for the biological war that destroyed most of humanity. Instead, the film only brings up those points, and then hides them, while contrarily canonizing Neville as a Christ figure (as seen in that famous crucifixion pose). Also, there is an uncomfortable undertone of fascism to the picture. Think of it this way: a lone man protects his blood against the colored (ivory white) hordes that hope to destroy him and his hold on the traditional ways (which destroyed the world, by the way!). In the end, this “pure” blood is valued above understanding or tolerance or even communication with the new social order. There’s something distinctly wrong about the whole set-up. If this movie were really about racial divisions, a détente would be declared, and humanity and the Family would find some way to co-exist. Instead, the coloreds are seen as vermin, an ugly reminder of American racial violence in the 1960s and 1970s, and the blood of the white man is seen as the legacy that will heal the future. One has to wonder how minorities might view that message.

Still, there’s the presence of Heston, the ultimate right-winger, battling for humanity, and living the ultimate male fantasy (though admittedly megalomaniacal...). Those factors mitigate a lot of the confusing rhetoric. It’s almost like there are two Omega Men. The intellectual side of the picture knows it’s full of untruth, and even fascist. But on the surface the picture is an entertaining, rollicking adventure that appeals to the heroic needs of every red-blooded American male. In some cases, it is best not to think too much about a movie’s implications, especially if that movie is as exciting, and downright enjoyable as *The Omega Man*.

***Play Misty for Me* (1971) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

“...the terror sequences, though seemingly swiped from *Psycho*, are good and scary. Eastwood should also be credited with drawing a flamboyantly neurotic, wild performance from Jessica Walter.... But the film flags principally because Eastwood can’t discriminate between the really good stuff he’s got and the draggy scenes that kill suspense. Any shrewd director would have excised a long, essentially useless romp along the Carmel coast with Eastwood and Donna Mills making love beneath a waterfall.”—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: “Special Request,” November 22, 1971, page 120.

“...Clint Eastwood, the director ... has made too many easy decisions about events, ... atmosphere, ... performances—including the rather inexpressive one of Clint Eastwood the actor, who is asked to bear more witness to a quality of inwardness than his better directors have yet had the temerity to ask of him.”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, November 4, 1971, page 52.

“...the scariest portrait of a female psycho the screen has yet given us is Jessica Walter’s neurotically obsessive and insanely possessive groupie in *Play Misty for Me*.... As the psycho fan whose spurned ardor leads to wrathful vengeance, she is astonishing. Her quick changes of mood are terrifyingly unpredictable; she literally makes the hairs bristle on the back of one’s neck.”—John McCarty, *Psychos: Eight Years of Mad Movies, Maniacs and Murderous Deeds*, St. Martin’s Press, 1986, page 126.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Clint Eastwood (Dave Garvey); Jessica Walter (Evelyn Draper); Donna Mills (Tobie Williams); John Larch (Sgt. McCallum); Jack Ging

(Frank); Irene Harvey (Madge); James McEachin (Al Monte); Clarice Taylor (Birdie); Donald Siegel (Bartender Murray); Duke Everts (Jay Jay); George Fargo (Man); Mervin W. Frates (Locksmith); Tim Frawley (Deputy Sheriff); Otis Kadan (Policeman); Brit Lind (Anjelica); Paul E. Lippman (2nd Man); Jack Kosslyn (Car Driver); Gina Patterson (Madalyn); Malcolm Moran (Man in Window).

CREW: A Universal Release of a Jennings Lang Presentation, a Malpaso Company Production, *Play Misty for Me*. *Director of Photography:* Bruce Serte. *Art Director:* Alexander Colitzer. *Set Decorator:* Ralph Hurst. *Assistant Director:* Bob Larson. *Script Supervisor:* Betty Abbott. *Dialogue Coach:* Jack Kosslyn. *Sound:* Waldon O. Watson, Robert Martin, Robert L. Hoyt. *Painting:* Don Heitkolter. “Misty” by arrangement with Octave Music Publishing Corp. *Costumes:* Helen Colvic. *Cosmetics:* Cinematique. *Titles and Opticals:* Universal Title. *Mr. Eastwood’s Wardrobe:* Brad Whitner of Carmel. *Color:* Technicolor. *Film Editor:* Carl Pingitore. *Associate Producer:* Bob Larson. “Misty” Composed and Performed by: Erroll Garner. *Original Music by:* Dee Barton. “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” Sung by: Roberta Flack. *Produced by:* Joel Dorn for Atlantic Records. *Screenplay:* Jo Helms, Dean Riesner. *Story:* Jo Helms. *Produced by:* Robert Daley. *Directed by:* Clint Eastwood. A Universal-Malpaso Company Picture. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 102 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the quaint little town of Carmel in scenic, coastal California, jazz DJ Dave Garvey runs a late-night radio show. During every show, a sultry-voiced woman calls in to request the song “Misty,” and Dave obliges. On one late night, Dave meets Evelyn Draper at a bar and takes her home. She tells him she is his “Misty” girl and that she wants to make love to him. Dave tells Evelyn he is involved, but Evelyn replies that they could spend just one night together, no strings attached. Dave agrees, and leaves the

next morning after a night of passion.

Later, Evelyn arrives unannounced at Dave's place, with bags of groceries. He is disturbed by her arrival but lets her stay, and they make love again. Afterwards, Evelyn proves a bit temperamental when a neighbor asks her to pipe down. She responds by laying on a car-horn and cussing.

Soon Dave meets up with his ex-girlfriend, Tobie, whom he still has strong feelings for. She left him because of his womanizing, but he convinces her that she is really the one he desires to be with. While Dave courts Tobie, Evelyn remains in the picture and tracks Dave down at a bar. There, she gets pushy with him, stealing his car keys and making demands on his time and freedom. She shows up at Dave's house that night, naked but for a jacket. Dave sleeps with her again and afterwards promises to call. He does not call her, and later forgets to confirm plans she is making for a late night date during the week. After Evelyn calls Dave at KRML to talk about the aforementioned date, Dave goes over to her place to straighten things out. They fight, break off the affair, and Evelyn flies into an angry frenzy. Later, she calls Dave at home to apologize, but he rebuffs her.

Dave resumes his romantic relationship with Tobie while Evelyn spies from the shadows. She appears at Dave's house one night, protesting, then goes to the bathroom and slits her wrists with a razor blade. Feeling guilty, Dave spends the day caring for Evelyn, even though he has a date with Tobie. He misses the date and awakens the next morning to find that Evelyn has borrowed his car. While she is out, she makes a duplicate set of keys to his house. Her behavior growing ever more questionable, Evelyn insults a businesswoman, Madge, who was planning to hire Dave to host the Monterey Jazz Festival. Evelyn's actions cost Dave the job and he finally realizes how disturbing an influence Evelyn has become. He meets with Tobie and tells her the truth about Evelyn. Evelyn flies off the handle, trashes Dave's house, and stabs David's maid, Birdie, with a butcher knife.

The police take Evelyn away, and Dave thinks the nightmare is over. He and Tobie make love in a beautiful forest, then enjoy the jazz festival, unaware that Evelyn is planning her final revenge. On

the job a few days later, Dave gets a call from Evelyn asking him to play “Misty.” She claims that she is better and headed to Hawaii for a new job. She quotes a poem by Edgar Allen Poe and says goodbye to her obsessive love. By midnight, however, Evelyn has had a dangerous turnaround. She appears in Dave’s bedroom and tries to murder him. Dave escapes this attempt, and informs the police of the situation. Sgt. McCallum warns him to change the locks in his house, and then McCallum plans to use the radio show to track Evelyn down. If she calls to request “Misty,” the cops will trace the call.

However, Evelyn is one step ahead of her opponents. She has moved in with Tobie under the name Annabel, the latest in a long line of revolving roommates, and now she plans to kill Tobie and Dave. A suspicious Dave remembers that “Annabel Lee” is the name of the Edgar Allan Poe poem Evelyn quoted him one night and races from the radio station to help the endangered Tobie. When he arrives, Dave finds that Evelyn has already murdered Sgt. McCallum with a very large pair of scissors. With Tobie in mortal danger, Evelyn and Dave fight to the death. The fight carries them to the ledge overlooking the shoreline far below, and only one of the lovers will survive.

COMMENTARY: Before celebrity stalking was a national concern in America, Clint Eastwood nailed the concept with *Play Misty for Me*, an effectively directed (and shot) suspense picture with a strong villain in Jessica Walter.

From the opening montage, Clint Eastwood declares his intention to throw every trick in the book at his directorial debut. The film opens with Clint driving through scenic colorful California. The scenery is beautiful, and jazz blares on the soundtrack as various helicopter shots capture the beauty of the location. As Eastwood fans would later learn, jazz music, and Carmel, California, are two of Eastwood’s favorite things in the universe, and so those predilections form the bedrock of *Play Misty for Me*. Surprisingly, the jazz music and the natural beauty work together thematically too. The gorgeous ocean, the lush trees, and the beautiful scenery all indicate Dave’s 1970s paradise, a “groovy” existence unencumbered by many concerns, either moral or financial. The

playful and relaxing jazz reinforces the idea of a casual existence (in which casual sex is the order of the day). That Dave's existence is so beautiful and blissful is important, because it shows the audience immediately what he has to lose. Evelyn threatens his perfect life, and we see evidence of that perfect life in his job, in his choice of car, in his home, and even in his music.

Play Misty for Me is really a good old fashioned morality play, a story about the downside of the sexual revolution. It reveals how encounters with strangers can cause unwanted entanglements. People who you don't really want in your life are suddenly granted access to the most intimate details of your life, by virtue of a casual sexual experience. In the scene involving Dave and Evelyn's first meeting, the camera seems to be positioned so that it is almost peering up Walter's skirt. This is a nicely composed shot, and a significant one, because it tells us exactly what function Evelyn is to serve for Dave. She is a sex object, nothing more, and a receptacle for his desires. So, as per the order of the early 1970s, he takes her home, sleeps with her, and has little use for her beyond that biological function. Slam bam.

In depicting this casual sex affair gone awry, Eastwood points the way to 1987's *Fatal Attraction*. Though that film's essence was all 1980s and yuppiesm (rather than being representative of the 1970s ideal of "whatever feels right"), there is nonetheless much similarity. In *Play Misty for Me*, a sexually hungry male brings a woman to his bed, claiming there will be "no strings attached." But she can't let go of the attractive, charismatic and powerful male figure, and even attempts to commit suicide to keep him. All that, including the suicide attempt, happens in *Fatal Attraction* too, of course, but the stakes are different. In the 1970s, what was at stake was Eastwood the bachelor's freedom. Evelyn was cramping Dave's life-style, affecting his job, and messing up his good thing with that hot little number Donna Mills. Reflective of its age, *Fatal Attraction* jeopardized not freedom, but the family and hearth of Michael Douglas's unfaithful rogue. Glenn Close's sexual predator threatened to destroy his security in that motion picture by queering things with his wife and child, and destroying his image as a respectable businessman.

Still, the films are alike in their view of casual sexual relationships: a man's desire for sex with strangers inevitably leads to the endangerment of that which he values most, whether it is freedom or security (and family). Of the two films, it is hard to say which is better, since they are both highly effective thrillers. All that can be said definitively is that *Play Misty for Me* came first, and that both films have more in common than initially meets the eye.

Eastwood is lucky, however, that his casting was so good in this film. Jessica Walter is effective in transmitting her character's neuroses and psychoses a piece at a time, thus escalating the audience's unease with her. Clearly, Evelyn gives audiences the creeps. She has a broad smile, an annoying demeanor, a foul mouth (an early signal of her instability), and keeps crossing the line of appropriate behavior with defiance. It is a powerful and menacing performance that could have come across as clichéd. Instead, Walter is unpredictable and eruptive as Evelyn. She's not easily forgotten. One has to remember too that she is threatening a basic American symbol of power (no, not Charlton Heston!), and if she weren't truly a powerful and scary figure, people would laugh instead of cringe at her confrontations with the stolid Eastwood.

Alas, Donna Mills does not fair so well in the film, perhaps because her part is less flashy and is weighted down by the ballast of clichés. Every romantic conversation she shares with Eastwood is made up of ridiculous, hopeless lines that have been uttered in romantic subplots since the beginning of film history. "I gotta figure where I'm at," says one character. "I don't want to get on that revolving door again," says another. It's all terribly interchangeable, and one feels that any problems in the Eastwood-Mills relationship is more an example of plot necessity than genuine differences or problems among the characters. The romantic scenes are pretty underwhelming and bland, even though Eastwood stages them in the most beautiful locales imaginable, and accompanies them with soft, romantic music, such as Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face."

Eastwood himself is the center of this love triangle, and he is an appropriate choice for the role of Dave. He does not have the warmest screen presence, but his harshness works for the picture

since Dave is supposed to be a love 'em and leave 'em kind of guy. And, what is known of Eastwood's personal life seems to verify that this character is closer to the real Eastwood than, say, *Dirty Harry*, or the gunslinger of *Unforgiven*. The bottom line is that Dave is a pretty shallow guy who thinks that his great house, his great car, and his love of great music make him "deep." But he treats people as objects, and he pays the price for it. He is not particularly heroic, he's just an average joe who likes a piece of ass now and then, and Eastwood captures the character's selfish and shallow nature very well.

The horror sequences in *Play Misty for Me* are powerfully staged, and even jolting. When Evelyn strikes, she inevitably does so directly at the camera (a cliché of the 1970s). Eastwood deploys a hand-held camera during the many surprise attacks, and that shaky, unhinged look provides for some startling, effective, and very real-looking bloodletting. The scene wherein Dave's maid, Birdie, is assaulted is a vicious little bloodbath, made more so by the fact that the ambush is completely undeserved. Only the climactic attack, which sees Dave tossing the insane Evelyn over a ledge, seems ineffectually staged: it is over too fast, and poorly lit.

Through his confident handling of the love triangle, Dave's inner world of jazz, nature and sex, and even Evelyn's violence, Eastwood makes a very compelling thriller. The only place his skills come up lacking is in the arena of pacing. The film is too long for a thriller, and Eastwood fritters away too much time at a jazz festival. There is an extended sequence filled with colorful shots of musicians and crowds playing and listening to good music, but the sequence is irrelevant to the picture as a whole. We know it's there because Eastwood is a jazz fan, but a clever director would have realized it was extraneous material and dropped it. A solid thriller depends on timing, pace and the snowballing of disturbing events to create a mood. A languorous, slow-moving montage of a jazz festival works against the overall tapestry of the film.

But *Play Misty for Me* lives on in horror film history because it is a cautionary tale every person can relate to, an explicit warning to playboys (or girls) to be careful who they bring home to their pads. One night, you might just get a wacko. On that level, even thirty

years later, *Play Misty for Me* has lost none of its visceral punch.

LEGACY: *Play Misty for Me* was the first picture directed by Clint Eastwood, and twenty some years later, he accepted the best director Academy Award for *Unforgiven* (1993). His most recent directorial effort was *Space Cowboys* (2000). The themes, events, and characters of *Play Misty for Me* were later regurgitated in the hit 1987 film *Fatal Attraction*.

See No Evil (1971) * * *

Critical Reception

“The whole story is possessed of a staggering imbecility, and proceeds at a trudging gait that seems to be Richard Fleischer’s natural pace.... The fondness for half-calf shots is a new trait: Bunuel’s fetishism without the humor, the sensuality, or the intelligence....”—Penelope Gilliatt, *New Yorker*: “Soaked Uncle,” September 15, 1971, page 69.

“Sarah [Mia Farrow] manages to wander through ... hazards obliviously.... Prolonged this way, the tension and suspense keep turning into a delightfully shaggy dog story, the sort that Hitchcock used to tell so expertly. Throughout these scenes, Fleischer’s camera slithers and crawls in front of Sarah’s movements, incidentally revealing the bodies and other evidence as it stays focused on her. This snake’s eye view is contrived enough to get laughs and yet appropriately menacing as well.”—Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr., *Commonwealth*, October 22, 1971, pages 88–89.

“Scenarist Brian Clemens offers no motivations and precious few plot twists. Nor is his head-on, harum-scarum approach improved by Richard Fleischer’s blunt direction, which favors sudden cuts to broken corpses and sadistic close-ups of a girl precipitously tumbling into catatonia. Manifestly, Fleischer is out

for only one thing: to inspire sudden fear. That he does, but at the expense of taste.”—Stanley Kanfer, *Time*: “Blind Fear,” September 20, 1971, page 74.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Mia Farrow (Sarah); Dorothy Alison (Betty Rexton); Robin Bailey (George Rexton); Brian Rawlinson (Barker); Diane Grayson (Sandy Rexton); Paul Nicholas (Jacko); Norman Eshley (Steve Reding); Barrie Houghton (Gypsy Jack); Michael Elphick (Gypsy Thom); Lila Kaye (Gypsy Mother); Christopher Matthews (Frost); Max Faulkner, Scott Fredericks, Reg Harding (Steve’s Men); Donald Bisset (Doctor).

CREW: Columbia Pictures and Filmways Present a Martin Ransohoff/Leslie Linder Production, *See No Evil*. *Production Manager:* Jilda Smith. *Art Director:* John Hoesli. *Director of Photography:* Gerry Fisher. *Film Editor:* Thelma Connell. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Elmer Bernstein. *Camera Operator:* Bernard Ford. *Set Decorator:* Hugh Scaife. *Assistant Director:* Terry Marcel. *Sound Mixer:* Robert Allen. *Sound Recording:* Ken Scrivener. *Continuity:* Pamela Carlton. *Wardrobe:* Stuart Freeborn. *Hairdresser:* Betty Glasgow. *Lighting Equipment:* Kee Electric (Lighting) Ltd. *Associate Producer:* Basil Appleby. *Written by:* Brian Clemens. *Produced by:* Martin Ransohoff, Leslie Linder. *Director:* Richard Fleischer. Filmed in Eastmancolor. The Film was photographed on location in Berkshire, England, by Genesis Productions Ltd. M.P.A.A. *Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A recently blinded young woman, Sarah, leaves the hospital to recuperate with her aunt and uncle at their horse farm. Soon after moving in, Sarah is driven to a meeting with her boyfriend, Steven. Though she lost her sight in a riding accident, Steven gives Sarah a new horse, and helps her overcome her fears

of the animal.

While Sarah is away, a stranger wearing cowboy boots shows up at the house of Sarah's Uncle George and murders the entire family (including George, Aunt Betty and young Sandy). Then Sarah returns home—to what she believes should be an empty house, completely unaware of the massacre and its aftermath, which is all around her. Night falls and Sarah's handicap prevents her from seeing all the signs of danger in the house, such as broken glass and gun shells. As she goes to sleep, Sarah is not even aware that Sandy's bloody corpse is just feet away. The next morning, Sarah starts to run a bath ... without realizing that Uncle George's corpse has been strewn into the tub. Before she discovers the corpse, Steven calls and brings Sarah her new horse. They go riding together in a rainstorm, and afterwards Steve reluctantly leaves the independent Sarah home alone again. This time, she discovers George's body, and falls down the cellar stairs in shock.

Meanwhile, the murderer realizes he has left an identifying bracelet behind at the crime scene, and returns to the house to find it. Sarah escapes from the killer, and runs into the yard-hand, Barker. He's been shot and is dying, but warns that the killer left a silver bracelet and has returned for it. Unaware there is writing on the bracelet, Sarah retrieves it and flees the house on horseback. The killer has heard her, and gives chase. Sarah is thrown from the horse, and wanders lost in the woods, until she runs into a family of gypsies. Unfortunately, the gypsies think the killer is one of their own, a man named Jack, and lie to Sarah about the name engraved on the jewelry.

While Sarah is in jeopardy, her horse arrives at Steven's farm, signaling trouble. He rushes to her house, finds her family dead, and starts to search for her. At the same time, Sarah has been locked in a cabin in a muddy dump. Steve finds her there and goes after the gypsies. But there has been a mix-up. The gypsy Jack is not the killer ... the bracelet actually reads "Jacko"—the name of one of Steve's farm-hands!

While Steven rushes home, Sarah is alone at his house with the killer. Jacko watches Sarah bathe, and then tries to drown her. Steve arrives just in time to save Sarah and dispatch the psychotic

Jacko.

COMMENTARY: *See No Evil* is an extremely deft, psycho-film that hinges on the following conceit: You're blind; you don't know where you are, and you don't know who to trust. It is the story of what happens when a critical sense (sight) is lost, and how that loss affects all the other senses, and the capacity to trust. Is it a sadistic film, as many critics have suggested, since it takes a helpless blind girl and puts her through the wringer? Perhaps so, but audiences go to horror movies to be terrorized, and this film uses every tool at its disposal, innocent blind girls included, to do just that. One can hardly fault a suspense film for being suspenseful, after all.

Since "blindness" is a core tenet of *See No Evil* (even in the title!), it is appropriate that director Fleischer obsesses on the way the camera sees things. For instance, the killer is never seen (until the climax) except as a pair of cowboy boots and jeans. Yet, the camera nicely reveals that he is evil in the opening sequence, as this figure walks a busy city strip that offers pertinent clues to his nature. The theater behind him is showing a double feature: *The Convent Murders* and *The Rapist Cult*. Other images of violence abound. We see toy guns, violent headlines on newspapers, and images of violence on TV. There are those viewers who complained that *See No Evil* never explained why Jacko was a killer, but the answers are all around him. Everything, from movies to TV, to newspapers, is filled with violence. By association, he is just one more violent component of a violent world. It is no coincidence that every image that accompanies this booted killer on his walk through the metropolis is related to death. This guy is death, himself! Or, at the very least, this is how the killer sees his world, made up of death, and again we should remember that sight is important to the film.

Fleischer plays his "game of vision" throughout the picture. His camera tracks Sarah's path into her house as if to count the footfalls, to chart the distance from the front door to the stairs. Why is this important? Again, this is how the character in the drama "sees" the world: a space to be navigated. To her, the walk from house to stairs is not a visual trip, but a set number of footsteps, a path, in darkness, from one place to another. The camera, by tracking this distance, expresses Sarah's perception of the walk.

Fleischer's camera spends much of the film's running time perched at ground level, making viewers acutely aware of space and distance, a very effective stance to adopt in a film in which every step to freedom is a challenge. Furthermore, by not revealing Jacko's face, Fleischer again creates an empathy with Sarah. Like this blind woman, we do not know who the killer is; we are literally left in the dark. Just as Sarah would not know the killer if she ran into him again, nor would we. Unless, of course, we recognized the boots...

See No Evil is one of those movies that is so successful at creating empathy for its star (and in expressing her limited point of view), that it becomes anxiety provoking. Accordingly, Fleischer has some wicked fun at the audience's expense as Sarah makes her way through a house that she does not realize is littered with corpses. Fleischer revels in revealing this massacre, again and again, until a real dread about it has been formed. When Sarah drops a pen, the camera tracks down to the floor, and we see the feet of a corpse in the background. Again, Sarah has no access to this information. To the blind, the dead are literally invisible. This tense set-up, in which the audience is aware of something the protagonist is not, is very effective in generating suspense.

In another startling moment, Sandy's dead hand pops into the foreground of a frame, animated by rigor mortis. It's an unexpected jolt, as is the sight of poor Uncle George, bloodied and dead in the bathtub.

Watching Mia Farrow tumble down stairs, slip in the mud, fight her way out of captivity, and get lost in the woods, one senses how exhausting a film this must have been to make. The actress gives it her all and is ably supported by the director, who makes the agony of her situation almost tangible. We identify with her misery, and consequently begin to pull for her to survive. Though there are clearly echoes of *Wait Until Dark* (1967) in the film, *See No Evil* is determined to cross all lines of good taste and appropriateness in its effort to scare. Really, it is a harrowing film.

Of course, there are some problems. Sarah seems way too agile for someone who has only recently been blinded. Also, the sequence with the gypsy—a red herring—seems an unnecessary twist in an

already twisted story. Furthermore, wind seems to function selectively (and with purpose) in the film, blowing open doors just at the precise moment Sarah might be affected by them, and so forth. That's a cheat, but for the most part Fleischer plays fair with the audience, showing them only what they need to see, not what they want to see. As a critic, this reviewer likes the way his camera reveals just a bit at a time, providing necessary, sometimes contradictory tidbits of information. The camera keeps the audience blinded with tunnelvision, and it is a nice metaphor for Sarah's condition. Those who objected to this film did so primarily on the basis that it feels manipulative. Yet, remembering the words of Alfred Hitchcock, a good suspense film should "play an audience like a piano." *See No Evil* accomplishes that directive, and reaches a crescendo of horror ... even if it doesn't play nice.

LEGACY: *See No Evil* is on the re-make trail for 2003.

***Straw Dogs* (1971) * * * ***

Critical Reception

"The subject of *Straw Dogs* is machismo. It has been the obsession behind most of Peckinpah's other films; now that it's out in the open, his strength and follies are clearly visible.... The setting, music, and the people are deliberately disquieting. It is a thriller—a machine headed for destruction ... the goal of the movie is to demonstrate that David *enjoys* the killing, and achieves his manhood in that self-recognition ... it confirms the old militarists' view that pacifism is unmanly, is pussyfooting, is false to nature.... [This is] a fascist work of art."—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, January 29, 1972, pages 80—85.

"...literally sophomoric. It resembles the horrified reaction of an adolescent to the discovery that evil really exists in the world, and his brief, if passionate, contemplation of the possibility that it might be universal. This, of course, is a no more

realistic appraisal of the world than the unblemished cheerfulness of a TV sitcom's microcosms. It is the obligation of the mature artist to reconcile and integrate these half-truths, and that is precisely where Peckinpah's vision fails him. *Straw Dogs* is a meaningless attack on a straw man—unredeemed, unrelenting evil.”—Richard Schickel, *Life*: “Don’t Play It Again Sam,” February 11, 1972, page 14.

“What makes the violence of *Straw Dogs* particularly disturbing is that Peckinpah steers clear of the stock responses to it. On the one hand, he does not equate violence with heroism.... On the other hand, Peckinpah does not equate violence with villainy by implying that it could and should have been avoided... Peckinpah is not concerned with putting labels of right or wrong on the violent actions and reactions in the film. Here, as in his earlier films, he is focusing on the tension between the individual and the disintegrating forces of society.”—William Johnson, *Film Quarterly*, 1972, pages 61–64.

“...most critics seem to have missed the point, and believe it [*Straw Dogs*] advocates violence as some kind of rite of passage, glorifies it as heroic act.... In *Straw Dogs*, Peckinpah's point is the horrible inevitability of human brutality, especially when an individual attempts to evade it.”—Robert Philip Kolker, *Journal of Popular Film*: “Oranges, Dogs, and Ultra-Violence,” Summer 1972, pages 159–172.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Dustin Hoffman (David Sumner); Susan George (Amy Sumner); David Warner (Henry Niles); Ken Hutchison (Norman); Peter Vaughn, T.P. McKenna, Del Henney, Jim Norton, Donald Webster, Len Jones, Sally Thomsett, Robert Keegan,

Peter Arne, Cherina Scher, Colin Welland.

CREW: From Cinerama Releasing Corp, ABC Pictures Corp. Presents Dustin Hoffman in Sam Peckinpah's film of a Daniel Melnick Production, *Straw Dogs*. *Director of Photography:* John Coquillon. *Production Design Consultant:* Julia Trevelyan Oman. *Music:* Jerry Fielding. *Screenplay:* David Zelag Goodman, Sam Peckinpah. *Producer:* David Melnick. *Director:* Sam Peckinpah. *Production Design:* Ray Simm. *Art Director:* Ken Bridgeman. *Set Dresser:* Peter James. *Titles Designed by:* Anthony Goldschmidt. *Assistant Director:* Peter James. *Assistant Director:* Terry Marcel. *Continuity:* Pamela Davies. *Camera Operator:* Herbert Smith. *Sound Recordist:* John Bramail. *Make-up:* Harry Frampton. *Wardrobe:* Tiny Nicholls. *Hairdresser:* Bobbie Smith. *Dialogue Director:* Katie Haber. *Special Effects:* John Richardson. *Stunt Coordinator:* Bill Cornelius. *Film Editors:* Roger Spottiswoode, Paul Davies, Tony Lawson. *Editorial Consultant:* Robert Wolfe. *Sound Editor:* Garth Craven. *Associate Producer:* James Swann. *Production Supervisor:* Derek Kavanagh. *Casting:* Miriam Brickman. *Based on the novel* The Siege of Trencher's Farm *by:* Gordon Williams. *Filmed on location in* the west of England and at Twickenham Film Studios, Twickenham, Middlesex, England, for Talent Associate Films Ltd. and Amerbroco Films Ltd. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 117 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A nerdy American mathematician, David Sumner, and his gorgeous wife, Amy, rent a cottage in the remote English village where she grew up. There, David hopes to write a book in peace, but soon finds that the locals are not very accepting of him or his foreign ways. Amy's old boyfriend, Charlie, is a macho guy who leads a crew of thugs and lowlifes. David hires the bunch to repair the roof over his cottage garage, but when he and Amy are gone shopping, the men go into the house and steal a pair of Amy's underwear. Charlie is convinced that Amy still wants him, not

David.

Charlie and the others delay work on the roof, irritating David. Meanwhile, they leer at Amy, who strips for a bath in plain view of the rowdies because she's angry with David. Another signal of trouble occurs on a tight country road when Charlie and his buddies try to run David into the path of oncoming traffic. When the family cat goes missing, Amy is sure Charlie has killed it. The cat shows up hanged in the bathroom closet, and Amy believes it was displayed there to prove to David that the fellas could get into his bedroom. But David is slow to point fingers and act decisively. Instead, he invites the thugs into his house and asks their help in carrying in a bear trap. He even shares a beer with them. Amy thinks David is a coward pure and simple, and is dead set against it when Charlie and his crew invite David to go out hunting with them.

While on the hunting trip, the crew ditches David at the first opportunity (saying he must wait for the ducks to show up...). They circle back to his cottage, and Charlie rapes Amy. She protests at first, but eventually gives over. Then, the others show up for a piece of the action too, and Amy is raped repeatedly. David arrives home and argues with Amy, who doesn't tell him what has happened. Finally shoring up his courage, David fires the men from the roof job, still unaware of their worst infraction.

The deadly events come to a head when the village idiot, Henry Niles, son of the town drunk and head troublemaker, accidentally kills the beautiful young Janice. When David accidentally hits Niles with his car, he gives him sanctuary in his cottage. But Charlie and his boys show up, spitting-mad, and demanding David turn over Henry. David refuses to turn the boy over to a mob, and Charlie's gang lays siege to the house. The town magistrate arrives to straighten things out, but is soon murdered by the thugs. Something snaps inside David, and he decides he will fight all five men, till death if necessary. He methodically defends his home with boiling water, bear traps, and anything else he can find. In the end, David is victorious, and for the first time in his life feels he is a man worthy of Amy's respect. Newly confident, David drives Henry Niles to the authorities...

COMMENTARY: Say what you will about the violent films of the

1970s, but at least they were generally about something. *A Clockwork Orange*, *Deliverance*, *Straw Dogs*, *The Last House on the Left*, and *The Wicker Man* were all appallingly brutal, it's true, but unlike *Rambo*, any *Friday the 13th* or the first-person video game shoot 'em ups of the 1990s, at least they had reasons and rationale for their intense violence. The violence in those pictures revealed something important, such as middle-class hypocrisy in *Last House*, or the freedom to choose in *A Clockwork Orange*. Nowhere is violence more clearly examined than in Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*, a film that attempts to discern the real meaning of courage, and looks at what it means to be a "man."

There are legions of viewers who hate this movie, and what they perceive it stands for. They look at David's choice to resolve conflict with violence, his bold post-ambush affirmation that he "did it," and that he "got 'em all" as some kind of vindication of brutality and killing. Contrarily, the film seems to go to great pains to state the argument that David becomes a killer only when it is a last resort. It is Amy, his wife, and the local thugs, who meet with the film's venom because they are the ones with the retrograde assumptions about what it means to be a man, a hero.

The conflict in *Straw Dogs* arises out of two factors. The first is that David is an outsider, and his ways are different. He is an intellectual man, a thinker, in a town where men make their livings as farm workers, repairmen, carpenters and the like. In other words, he is mind-oriented; they are body-oriented. Thus David and Charlie are opposites. This plays out even in the physical casting. Charlie (Hutchison) is large, physical and imposing. David (Hoffman) is short, wormy, and wears glasses. He is the evolved modern man versus Charlie's caveman. The town is fascinated with David because he is so totally different from what villagers are used to seeing. Some people (like Janice) are attracted to him, and others, like Charlie, feel threatened by him. If Europeans had rednecks, these townspeople would certainly qualify (they even sing songs about sexual intercourse with livestock...). This culture clash makes David feel the inferiority that all nerds feel when faced with physically capable, athletic men. It also causes Charlie and his gang to snicker at David behind his back. He is not accepted by the gang because he is not big and strong, and physically powerful.

The second conflict involves Amy. One must remember that she too has grown up in this town. In fact, she dated Charlie—she grew up with Charlie—and hence has more in common with his mindset than with David's. To Amy, David is different from any man she has ever known, and she has contempt for him because he is not strong in the way that Charlie is, the way she is familiar with. She doesn't understand David's true strength is as a civilized human being. For instance, Amy expects to be carried away in love, but David is a methodical and unromantic person. Before sex, he takes off his watch, his glasses, and then pauses to set his alarm. Though he is interested and playful, he is not overwhelmingly erotic or "forceful," and Amy sees this, in comparison with the macho Charlie, as less than manly.

Amy criticizes David, arguing that she should leave him "alone" with his blackboard. Her ego can't take David's attitude towards romance. She is used to a man who will command and dominate her, and just does not know what to make of David.

And that's just in the bedroom. Clearly, Amy also does not understand David in other avenues of interpersonal communication. When the cat is killed, David feels it is not right to blatantly accuse Charlie of murder until he knows the situation. He shows too much rationality in this stance, and not enough emotion. Amy takes his stance as one of cowardice: he doesn't have enough backbone for her taste. Were the situation reversed, Charlie would come out and brutalize David over a suspected wrong. Again, it is the battle of evolved man versus unevolved man, but in this case, David is sabotaged by his choice of women. Amy cannot understand why David treats his enemies with respect and courtesy, and even sees such behavior as weakness. And, no doubt, there is some truth to that. By growing up in an environment where he never had to fight, David is slow to act, and reluctant to fight. His delays give rise to Amy's rape in one sense or another (though she leads Charlie on, and parades around in front of him half-naked...).

But, the interesting thing about these characters is that David, for all his flaws, is seen as superior to the natives because he shows one quality that everybody else lacks: empathy. When David takes care of Niles, the village idiot, he notes that the villagers must be

worried about Janice. “I know how I’d feel if I had a daughter missing,” he says with a sense of mercy. So he sympathizes with his enemies, and with someone of a lesser intelligence (Henry Niles). In fact, it is so important to him that the matter be handled justly that he risks his life to save Niles from the mob. That, finally, is what prompts David to violence: the protection of the innocent.

It is in this crucible of pressure that Amy shows her true colors (and her inclination towards the townspeople who have refused to accept her choice of husband). “I don’t care!” She says of Niles, showing no empathy for him whatsoever. All she cares about is her own protection. But David does fight, and win, not for himself, but for the “intellectual” principle of justice. What Peckinpah seems to be saying is that civilized man has the capacity to use violence (and to use it intelligently) when the situation warrants it. He may be slow to act because he reasons that violence usually solves nothing, but eventually he will act, and act definitively. It’s a little sad, however, that Amy only comes around when David, acting as she would expect of a man, starts to slap her around and talk to her in the language she is accustomed to. Some people, the film says, don’t change. They’re stuck in their parochial perceptions.

Does *Straw Dogs* advocate violence? No, not really. What it actually advocates is justice. There is that moment when David declares “I did it, I beat ‘em all,” but one should note that the victory is immediately followed by another attack—the final assault from one of the surviving gang. The moment of David’s victory is immediately undercut by another battle, one in which Amy comes to his defense. The fact of the matter is that he didn’t beat the gang alone, he needed Amy to help. So it is hard to see how the film advocates violence or a sense of machismo. Indeed, David’s declaration of victory is less a statement of the film’s philosophy than a reiteration of a popular horror movie cliché. David declares victory, fostering a false peace, and then *BOOM!* Up pops another villain! It’s the old lull before the peak, the calm before the storm, and it is a technical necessity in horror film finales.

It seems clear that in *Straw Dogs*, David is violent when it is a matter of protecting that which he loves and cherishes (both people and principles). When Charlie is violent, it is to take what he wants,

whether that “want” be Amy, Niles, or the cat. He is at the whim of his violence, and unable to express his desires in any but brutal fashions. David is more evolved, but he can fight on Charlie’s level when push comes to shove. It’s not so much “the savage within us all,” as it is meeting brute force with brute force when the situation warrants it.

All this meditation on violence, and what it means to be a man, is handled expertly by Peckinpah, a director who films violence as though a dance. Slow-motion photography, tight framing, quick cuts, cockeyed angles and other formalist techniques combine beautifully to form the film’s final siege. This battle is long in coming (and some people find the film boring up to this point), but it caps off the thematic point of the film: that David is finally roused to violence when he has exhausted all civilized means of dealing with Charlie.

Straw Dogs is built on a strong horror foundation. The siege is a popular conceit for genre films (witness *Night of the Living Dead* and *Assault on Precinct 13*). The idea of an outsider in a strange land is another oft-seen set up (witness *And Soon the Darkness* and *The Wicker Man*), and even the family versus family nature of the film’s conflict is one that has been seen many times (*Last House on the Left*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and other work of Wes Craven come to mind immediately). Even the idea of civilized man versus uncivilized man is horror fodder (seen in *Deliverance* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, among others). Yet *Straw Dogs* is valuable and distinct for the manner in which it goes beyond these cornerstones to sketch interesting and provocative characters.

There is ample reason, for instance, to believe that Amy was at least half courting Charlie’s sexual advances. The character is sexualized from the start, and we see her with erect nipples in no less than the second or third shot of the film. Later, she refuses to wear a bra, and gallivants about naked. The feminists out there will no doubt say that she was not courting rape—but in this town, in this environment, with these guys around? Isn’t her action inflammatory at the least, considering the tenor of the locals? That’s just one topic that *Straw Dogs* leaves open for debate, but there are more.

For instance, is David so far out a leftie (i.e. liberal) that he puts the

defense of a known murderer (Niles) above the defense of his wife? There's evidence of that too. Basically, all the characters are shaded by their foibles and biases, and events can be interpreted in different ways.

There are no easy answers about man's violent nature, and so *Straw Dogs* cannot hope to easily answer the questions it so artfully raises. As is so often the case in film, it is the discussion that's important, not the solution. And the words, the punctuation to that discussion are the formalist techniques of Sam Peckinpah, a director who knew a thing or two about violence. A challenging picture, *Straw Dogs* is one of the 1970s' most endlessly fascinating, and endlessly debated, horror films.

Vampire Circus

Cast & Crew

CAST: Adrienne Corri (Gypsy); Thorley Walters (Bürgermeister); Lynne Frederick (Dora Mueller); Richard Owens (Kersh); Robin Hunter (Hauser); Robin Sachs (Henreich); David Prowse (Strongman); Laurence Payne (Mueller).

CREW: *Directed by:* Robert Young. *Written by:* Judson Kingberg. *Director of Photography:* Moray Grant. *Produced by:* Wilbur Stark. *Film Editor:* Peter Musgrave. A Hammer Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 88 minutes.

DETAILS: In early 19th century Eastern Europe, a circus run by vampires and other ghouls makes its home in a village infected with the plague. Before long, the town is in double trouble. One of Hammer's few non-Dracula, non-Carmilla vampire tales, with some interesting moments.

Werewolves on Wheels

Cast & Crew

CAST: Severn Darden (One); Stephen Oliver (Adam); Duece Berry (Tarot); D. J. Anderson (Helena).

CREW: *Directed by:* Michel Levesque. *Written by:* David M. Kauffman, Michel Levesque. *Produced by:* Paul Lewis. *Director of Photography:* Isadore Mankofsky. *Film Editor:* Peter Parshes. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

DETAILS: A bold (yet bizarre) attempt to meld “biker” movies like *Easy Rider* (1969) with the horror genre. It starts rolling when a gang of roaming cyclists is transformed into werewolves after confronting a demonic cult.

Who Slew Auntie Roo? (1971) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Shelley Winters (Mrs. Forrest); Mark Lester (Christopher); Ralph Richardson (Mr. Benton); Judy Cornell (Clarine); Michael Gothard (Albie); Hugh Griffith (the Pigman); Lionel Jeffries (Willoughby); Chloe Franks (Katy); Rosalie Crutchley (Miss Henley); Pat Heywood (Dr. Mason); Richard Beaumont (Peter); Jacquelin Cowper (Angela); Marianne Stone (Miss Wilcox); Charlotte Sayce (Katharine).

CREW: American International Pictures, James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff present an American International/Hemdale Production. *Casting:* Sally Nicholl. *Production Manager:* Donald Toms. *Assistant Director:* Colin Brewer. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Bridget Sellers. *Color:* Movielab. *Film Editor:* Tristram Cones. *Art Director:* George Provis. *Director of Photography:* Desmond Dickinson. *Camera Operator:* Norman Jones. *Sound Recorder:* Ken Ritchie, Richard Langford. *Sound Editor:* Peter Leonard. *Make-up:* Eddie Knight, Sylvia Craft.

Hairdressing: Pat McDermott, Joyce Jones.
Continuity: June Randall. *Music:* Kenneth V. Jones.
Executive Producer: John Pellatt. *Original Screenplay:*
David Osborn. *Screenplay:* Robert Blees, James
Sangster. *Additional Dialogue:* Gavin Lambert.
Executive Producers: Samuel Z. Arkoff, James H.
Nicholson. *Directed by:* Curtis Harrington. Filmed at
Shepperton Studios, Middlesex, England. *M.P.A.A.*
Rating: PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the midst of a terrible storm in the 1930s, a medium named Benton arrives at the Forrest mansion to conduct a séance. Old Mrs. Forrest, Auntie Roo, is a show-business has-been who is desperate to contact her dead daughter, Catherine. She is unaware that her servants and Mr. Benton are scamming her. Others in the community are likewise unaware that every night, Auntie Roo cradles and sings to the rotting corpse of her dead child in a secret nursery...

At the annual Christmas party at Auntie Roo's house, two orphans (Katie and Christopher) stow away in the trunk of Inspector Willoughby's car, and attend the party. Auntie Roo welcomes them along with the other children, stuffs them all with fine food, and showers them with presents. On Christmas morning, it snows and Roo invites Katie, who resembles her beloved Catherine, to come live with her permanently. She doesn't extend the same offer to Christopher. A suspicious Christopher uses the house dumbwaiter to spy on Auntie Roo, and learns how she caters to the corpse in Catherine's room. Chris escapes Roo's detection, but is now convinced that she is evil, like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*.

When it is time for the children to leave for the orphanage, Katie is nowhere to be found, and Chris is convinced Roo is hiding her, fattening her up to eat her. In fact, Roo now believes Katie is Catherine's reincarnation, and has trapped her in the house! No one at the orphanage believes Christopher's story because he has a reputation as a liar, and Roo is known as a kind benefactor of children. Christopher sneaks back to Roo's house to rescue his sister, and steal Roo's valuable jewels. He finds Katie in the secret nursery, and convinces her to leave Roo the witch before they are

both eaten for supper. Unfortunately, Roo re-captures the children before they can escape. She then fires all the house help when she learns of their plan to scam her. Now it is just her and the two children in the giant mansion.

Inspector Willoughby drops by the next morning to search the house for the two missing children. He does not find the secret room where they are trapped, and goes on about his business. Christopher matches wits with Roo, with his sister's freedom the prize. Roo locks the children in a closet as she prepares a meal, but they outsmart her, escape and lock her inside. Then they start a fire in the house, killing Roo. They escape "the evil witch's" dungeon with Roo's jewels.

COMMENTARY: If you think about it, most good horror movies come from stories we first encountered in childhood. For instance, *The Blair Witch Project*, with kids lost in the woods, evokes portions of *Hansel and Gretel*. So it's only natural that along comes *Who Slew Auntie Roo*, a mild horror film that mines territory all too familiar to the young. It is one part *Hansel and Gretel*, and one part *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. The result is an entertaining, resonant picture that explores horror in a decidedly minor key.

"Crazy" Auntie Roo, played by Shelley Winters as a smothering psychopath, doubles for Hansel and Gretel's witch, of course, and Christopher and Katie represent the title characters themselves. They lose their way, are entrapped by a witch, and fear a terrible end. What's interesting, however, is that this comparison is mostly in the mind of the children. They know the story of *Hansel and Gretel*, and so put Roo into that context. Naturally, she never intends to eat them, only to take care of them. This may represent two different things. Firstly, the childish misperception that Roo is a witch could be an indication that children see the world in a different light and that their defense mechanisms come up when they are threatened. Hence, when they meet a psychopath, their minds categorize her as a witch, like the one from a familiar story. Oppositely, the children may simply be wrong about Roo. She seems more pitiful a character than an evil one, and there is some sympathy generated for her at the end of the story when the children lock her up and burn her alive (as if in an oven...). That

fate hardly seems deserved.

Who Slew Auntie Roo also plays on elements from the tale of the boy who cried wolf. Specifically, Christopher has lied so frequently and so effectively that no one believes him when he tells them his crazy story about Roo and Katie, which happens to be true. In this case, it is fair to say that the characters are archetypal. They are also Dickensian: orphans, out of *Oliver Twist*, perhaps. Whatever the intended source material, *Who Slew Auntie Roo* seems to be a chillingly good fairy tale put to celluloid. It is never really scary, and Roo is a villain only by virtue of her insanity, but it is important to remember that the images of horror movies are also the images of fairy tales.

For how different from the giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* is Leatherface, when push comes to shove? Both the fairy tale and the horror film play on basic fears (of being eaten; of being captured; of being taken away from family) with basic villains (giants; witches; ghouls; flesh-eating cannibals...). *Who Slew Auntie Roo* simply takes the logical step of making the connection a tad more obvious. One cannot watch this film without thinking of *Hansel and Gretel*, and the like. Thus there's a pleasantly nostalgic feeling to the film.

The same feeling is generated by *Who Slew Auntie Roo*'s setting: Christmas time. The Christmas holiday has, for whatever reason, frequently been the locale of horror stories. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is, after all, a story about a green monster who subverts the holiday for his own purposes. Perhaps it is an effective setting because people generally associate pleasant things with snow, Christmas trees, presents, and turkey dinners, and when something terrible happens, it is all the more jarring. *Gremlins* (1984) traded on this fact with a ghoulish story about Santa Claus and a chimney. *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (1984) and all its dreadful sequels likewise mined the holidays for gruesomeness and gore instead of nogg and cheer. But, besides again feeling Dickensian (à la *A Christmas Carol*), *Auntie Roo* somehow feels classic with this combination of fairy tale and holiday settings

Fans of the hard stuff are not going to be really fond of this film. Despite the corpse in the nursery (which dissolves in Roo's grip...), and tense moments in dumbwaiters, this is might accurately be

described as a horror film for children.

***The Wicker Man* (1971) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“Robin Hardy directed the well-researched film so skillfully that second and third viewings are enjoyable. Richly photographed, beautifully paced and intelligently directed.”—Frank Manchel, *An Album of Modern Horror Films*, Franklin Watts, Publisher, 1983, page 45.

“Literate and intelligently conceived horror story with strong sexual and religious overtones, building to a shocking and disturbing climax.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 290.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Edward Woodward (Sgt. Howie); Britt Ekland (Willow); Diane Cilento (Miss Rose); Ingrid Pitt (Librarian); Christopher Lee (Lord Summerisle); Roy Boyd (Broome); Walter Carr (School Master); Lindsay Kemp (Aldo MacGregor); Kevin Collins (Old Fisherman); Russell Waters (Harbor Master); Leslie MacKie (Daisy); Irene Sunters (Mrs. Morrison); Ian Campbell (Oak); Aubrey Morris (Old Graveyard Groundskeeper); Donald Eccles (T.H. Lennox); Geraldine Cowper (Rowan Morrison); Barbara Ann Brown (Woman with Baby); Juliette Cadzow (Villager on Summerisle); Ross Campbell (Communicant); Penny Cluer (Callie); Michael Cole (Musician); Myra Forsyth (Mrs. Grimmond); John Hallam (P. C. McTaggart); Alison Hughes (Fiancée to Howie); Charles Kearney (Butcher); Fiona Kennedy (Holly); John MacGregor (Baker); Jimmy Mackenzie (Briar); Jennifer Martin (Myrtle Morrison); Bernard Murray (Musician); Helen

Norman (Villager on Summerisle); Lorraine Peters (Girl on Grave); Tony Roper (Postman); John Sharp (Doctor Ewan); Elizabeth Sinclair (Villager on Summerisle); Andrew Tompkins (Musician); Ian Wilson (Communicant); Richard Wren (Ash Buchanan); John Young (Fishmonger).

CREW: British Lion Presents a Peter Snell Production, *Anthony Shaffer's The Wicker Man*.
Sound Editor: Vernon Messenger. *Assistant Editor:* Denis Whitehouse. *Casting Director:* Maggie Cartier. *Publicity:* Frank Law. *Stills:* John Brown. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Masada Wilmot. *Make-up:* Billy Partleton. *Hairdresser:* Ian Dorman. *Assistant Director:* Jake Wright. *Location Manager:* Jilda Smith. *Unit Manager:* Mike Cowans. *Continuity:* Sue Merry. *Production Secretary:* Beryl Harvey. *Camera Operator:* Jimmy Devis. *Focus:* Mike Drew. *Sound:* Robin Gregory, Bob Jones. *Production Manager:* Ted Morley. *Choreographer:* Stewart Hopps. *Costume Designer:* Sue Yelland. *Second Unit Photography:* Peter Allwork. *Associate Musical Director:* Gary Carpenter. *Music Performed by:* Magnet. *"Corn Rigs" Sung by:* Paul Giovanni. *Art Director:* Seamus Flannery. *Music Composed by:* Paul Giovanni. *Director of Photography:* Harry Waxman. *Film Editor:* Eric Boyd-Perkins. *Screenplay:* Anthony Shaffer. *Produced by:* Peter Snell. *Directed by:* Robin Hardy. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 84 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Sgt. Howe, a by-the-book, prim-and-proper English police officer, flies to the island of Summerisle off the west coast of Scotland to investigate reports of a missing girl named Rowan Morrison. On arrival, he visits Rowan's family, and finds that they are unconcerned about her disappearance. That night, he stays at the Green Man Inn, and Willow, the innkeeper's beautiful daughter, attempts to tempt him with an alluring nude dance. Howe summons all of his Christianity to avoid temptation, remembering his fiancée at home, and forces himself to sleep in peace.

The next morning, Sgt. Howe witnesses the games and rituals of the people of Summerisle, most of which concern fertility and phallic symbols. Howe abhors the rampant sexuality, but continues his search nonetheless. He discovers Rowan's name in the teacher's roll book, though neither the teacher nor the students claim to know her. The teacher informs the sergeant of Summerisle's pagan beliefs, and that Rowan is, in Christian terms, considered dead.

Howe proceeds to the graveyard to find Rowan's corpse, and leaves a crucifix at her grave, horrified by the paganism of the people. He then visits the island's leader, Lord Summerisle, and they debate their respective religions. Summerisle grants Howe permission to exhume Rowan's body, and determine the cause of death, but Howe finds only a dead rabbit in the coffin. It slowly dawns on Howe that Rowan was murdered in some barbaric ritual, and he informs Summerisle that he intends to launch a full-scale inquiry into the matter. His specific fear is that Rowan was sacrificed as part of last year's May Day festival. Howe resolves to remain on the island for the upcoming May Day celebration, just to be sure the atrocity is not repeated.

At the town library, Howe reads about May Day and learns that the ritual involves human sacrifices and a huge bonfire around wicker effigies ... all conducted with the intent of improving crop fertility, which has been bad in recent years. When Howe finds his plane sabotaged and the rituals beginning, he steals a costume and joins the processional as it marches through the town, down the mountainside and finally to the beach. There, on a cliff, the ritual sacrifice to the Sun God will occur. There, he also finds his quarry: Rowan Morrison alive and well.

Strangely, Rowan is in no need of rescuing. Her disappearance was merely a ruse to bring Howe to the island. Howe realizes he has been led about step by step by Summerisle and his heathen people. It is Howe, a Christian crusader, a virgin, and now a participant in the parade, who is to be the human sacrifice for the year! At Summerisle's instruction, Howe meets his appointment with the giant wicker man, a cage in which he is burned alive in honor of pagan gods.

COMMENTARY: One of the most cleverly crafted films to come out

of the 1970s, *The Wicker Man* is a stinging indictment of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. It is structured as a mystery, but as usual, the best mysteries are those which end with a total, yet logical, surprise. *The Wicker Man* satisfies that requirement and so much more as it reaches its terrifying apex.

It is not too difficult to view *The Wicker Man* as a culture clash. An outsider, a prim and proper Christian policeman (Howe), arrives in Summerisle, an island with its own customs. Yet, oddly, the values of the outsider are not, in this situation, lauded above those of the natives. Instead, Howe is shown to be a hypocrite as director Robin Hardy spells out a well-defined Christianity vs. Paganism debate. His point seems to be, correctly, that there are absurdities and contradictions in all religions, so it is useless and wasteful to bother debating which one is better or superior. Yet, Sgt. Howe is unable to see past his faith to determine the fallacies of his own chosen belief system. He is an arrogant Christian who arrives in a culture he knows nothing about, and then rapidly determines that it is inferior because Christianity has not taken hold there. When Howe brazenly deposits a makeshift crucifix upon Rowan's tomb, he is imposing his own belief system on someone (and the family of someone) that has already thoughtfully developed a different set of beliefs. What right does he have to supersede that decision, simply because *he* values Christianity? What arrogance!

The battle of the religions rages in other ways throughout the film as well. Howe is upset that the Summerisle people are pagans. He thus sees them as primitives who are "raving mad." This is because they embrace sexuality (rather than repressing it, as is typical of Christianity), and believe that when human life ends, the soul returns to trees, fires, air, the water and other elements. For Howe, that is a leap of belief he will not take. Yet what does he believe? That Jesus walked on water? That Jesus returned from the dead in the resurrection? That Jesus was born without an earthly father? That the wine and wafer of communion are the Lord's body and blood? Isn't that last bit representative of ... *gasp* ... cannibalism? This is the connection Howe is unable to make. He can't see that his religion is no more or less believable than anybody else's.

The Wicker Man artfully brings home this point, and raises the

possibility that Christianity's ascent in the world is little more than a fluke. The people of Summerisle, after all, live in an alternative society in which they are quite happy, and quite religious. No, they don't have churches, or ministers, and yes, their rites feature nudity and fertility, but that just makes so-called "paganism" different from Christianity, not necessarily wrong.

But, going even deeper, *The Wicker Man* is impressive because by pitting two disparate religions against one another, it makes an interesting point. At the finale of the film, the Summerisle residents pray to their God, killing Howe, as he prays to his own savior while awaiting his death. There is a feeling of futility here, that both parties are, in fact, deluded. Man shouldn't be killing his brother over religious differences, and the film becomes an indictment of the idea of religion as a whole. It is seen as a false comfort. It won't grow the crops, and it won't give you peace everlasting. It is just an excuse by which people kill each other. That's a well-thought-out point, and whenever this author is confronted with people who seem to believe that horror movies are a bad influence on society, he politely reminds them that, in point of fact, religion is a worse influence on society. Whether Muslim or Christian, more people have killed each other over religion than have ever killed each other over a venue of ideas (such as a genre of film, like horror). *The Wicker Man* likewise understands how religion can be poisonous.



Christopher Lee and Britt Ekland prepare for location shooting on *The Wicker Man* (1971).

What is rather remarkable about this film is not that it has so unique a theme, but that it explores it with such depth and success. The film leads us, like Howe, to a wholly unexpected destination. At first, the people of Summerisle merely seem different, then seductive, then mysterious. It is not until it is too late that the audience realizes just how dangerous the island is, and that Howe has walked into a well-designed trap. Indeed, the Summerisle folk have been waiting for just such a powerful sacrifice for a long time. Howe is a man who came of his own free will. He is a man who came as a virgin (no pre-marital sex, thank you, Ms. Ekland!). He is a man who came as a voice of the law, and, finally, as a fool. All these things make him the perfect target. It is only in understanding all this that one sees why the film has gone to such a great effort to delineate Howe as a rigid prude, as a religious zealot. Those are the very things that cost him his life!

The Wicker Man is a highly sexual film, another reason that the right wing probably wouldn't appreciate it. However, it uses sex to delineate another difference between Howe and the natives of the

island. Ekland comes to Woodward, naked and irresistible, beckoning him to sex. Had he wanted to survive his trip (and had he understood the plan), he would have made love to her ... and that would have mitigated his strength as a sacrifice. Instead, Woodward's Howe stuck to his "holy" guns, and evaded her seduction ... thereby becoming a fool instead. He doesn't get that pre-marital sex, taboo in Catholicism, is encouraged on Summerisle.

The Maypole song (and ritual) is also highly sexual, and it is clear that the film benefits from the new freedom of the 1970s. Thus *The Wicker Man* can show a flashback of Christian communion at one moment, yet in another moment depict an orgy in the grass, with naked men and women making love over a grave. It's an odd, but potent combination that reminds us how very different belief systems can believe very different things.

The full breadth of *The Wicker Man*'s horror does not come until its climax. Howe has been led to a giant wicker man, where he pleads for his life. Seen from a low angle, this pagan statue is a gigantic and imposing symbol of inevitable doom. Outnumbered, Howe goes to his death, put inside the wicker man. He is then forced to watch as the natives light the wicker effigy from below, and fire starts to lick and lap closer and closer. It is a terrifying moment, as the audience realizes there will be no escape for Howe. This is the end of the line. It is a kind of sick joke, however, that the Summerisle people don't see it as murder. After all, they're giving him a martyr's death ... what more could a good Christian want? If Howe truly believes that Heaven awaits him, he should have nothing to fear, right? Somehow, as the fire surrounds him, one gets the idea that the closed-minded Howe is *finally* questioning his beliefs.

The Wicker Man is not only a great and meaningful film, it is one of the ten best horror movies of the 1970s. It makes us look at our own religion and ask why it looks the way it does. It makes us question the things that organized religions want us to take for granted. It's a film about a man who is so cowed by his religion's dogma that he walks unwitting into a flame. That's a testament either to his faith, or his stupidity. You choose.

Critical Reception

“...in its simple-minded way, *Willard* taps into a couple of good, common fantasies, ... and its cleverness and appeal lies [*sic*] in the way ... it imperceptibly modulates from the former to the latter.... *Willard* transcends its genre; becomes a metaphorical representation of what we have come to understand as ... the tragedy of them—the tragedy of multiplication. The analogy might be between Willard and Mayor Lindsay, Willard and Robert McNamara, Willard and the chief executive of any sprawling social organism ... where the population under his nominal control has outrun the known techniques of rational governance.”—Richard Schickel, *Life*, August 27, 1971, page 11.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Bruce Davison (Willard Stiles); Sondra Locke (Joan); Elsa Lanchester (Henrietta Stiles); Michael Dante (Brandt); Jody Gilbert (Charlotte Stassen); William Hansen (Brasin); John Myhers (Carlson); J. Pat O'Malley (Jonathan Farley); Joan Shawlee (Alice); Ernest Borgnine (Al Martin); Almira Sessions (Carrie Smith); Pauline Drake (Ida Stassen); Helen Spring (Mrs. Becker); Alan Baxter (Spencer); Sherri Presnell (Mrs. Spencer).

CREW: From BCP, A Service of Cox Broadcasting Corporation. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Alex North. *Executive Producer:* Charles A. Pratt. *Screenplay:* Gilbert A. Ralston. *Based on the novel Ratman's Notebooks by:* Stephen Gilbert. *Produced by:* Mort Briskin. *Directed by:* Daniel Mann. *Director of Photography:* Robert B. Hauser. *Art Director:* Howard Hollander. *Editorial Supervision:* Warren Low. *Assistant Director/Unit Production Manager:* Robert Goodstein. *Casting:* Irving Lande. *Set Decorator:* Ralph S. Hurst. *Chief Electrician:* Don

Johnson. *Head Grip*: Robert Moore. *Sound Mixer*: Harold Lewis. *Construction Coordinator*: Harold Nyby. *Special Effects*: Bud David. *Properties*: Alan Gordon. *Script Supervisor*: Hazel Hall. *Make-up*: Gus Norin. *Hairstylist*: Hazel Washington. *Costumes*: Eric Seelig, Dorothy Barkley. *Socrates and Ben trained by*: Moe DiSesso. *Post-Production Supervisor*: Houseley Stevenson. *Assistant Film Editor*: Howard Deane. *Music Supervisor*: Milton Lustig. *Sound Effects*: James J. Klinger. *Recorded by*: Glenn Glenn Sound. *Photographic Effects*: Howard A. Anderson Company. *Color*: Deluxe. A Cinerama Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 95 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Since it takes only 21 days for a rat to have a litter of ten to twelve, we bought a dozen and left it up to them”¹⁰.—Moe Di Sesso, *Willard*’s rat trainer and wrangler, on the economics of rat breeding.

SYNOPSIS: Meek and mild clerk Willard Stiles lives a miserable existence. At home, he lives with an overbearing and sick mother who demands attention. At work, he must kowtow to the boss, the tyrannical Al Martin. Martin is the very man who stole the family business out from under Willard’s family, and he takes a particular delight in humiliating young Stiles. Making matters worse, the Stiles mansion is falling apart from disrepair, and the once-wealthy family has fallen on hard times financially. Willard works 80 hours a week, but can only just manage to pay the bills. Although Al Martin has assigned Willard a beautiful temp, Joan, to help him sort out his job responsibilities, Willard is sure it is only a matter of time before he is fired.

On Willard’s birthday, Willard’s mother invites all of her old friends (all of whom want something from the family) for a party, and Willard gets angry. Blowing off steam, he goes to the backyard, and unexpectedly befriends several rats he finds living in the empty rock pool. Unlike the human beings all around him, Willard finds the rats responsive to his kindness, and sets about to train them. He has

soon made friends of the little creatures. His favorite is the white mouse, Socrates, but the smartest of the bunch is a black rat that Willard names Ben.

When Al Martin refuses to give Willard a raise, he suggests that Willard sell the house to him. Willard refuses, and Martin berates him for being just like his old man. To get back at Martin, Willard releases his army of trained rats at Martin's anniversary party. A swarm of rats overrun the shindig, sending Martin's clients and high-society friends screaming away in terror.

The next day, Willard is forced to leave work when he learns that his mother has passed away. At her funeral, Willard gets news that the house is heavily mortgaged, and that there is no money left in his mother's estate. Before long, Martin and other vultures descend on the house, offering to help Willard in exchange for favors and ownership of the Stiles mansion. Willard holds the buzzards at bay, but overhears Martin's plan. The nasty old bastard wants to fire Willard, buy the house, and then level it so he can put up cheap apartments.

Soon, Willard's rat army has moved out of the backyard and into the cellar. Willard treats Socrates with real kindness, allowing him to sleep in his bedroom, but is inexplicably cruel to Ben. One day, Willard purchases a car with his mother's last sum of money, and drives Socrates and Ben to work with him. He stashes them in an out-of-the-way records room that only he visits. On the job, Willard starts to develop feelings for Joan, and she reciprocates, even buying a pet cat for him. Knowing a cat would never live with rats, Willard ditches the cat at his first opportunity. Even as all seems to be going well with the rats and Joan, another financial snafu strikes. As it turns out, Willard owes back taxes on his house. Unfortunately, not one of his mother's good-for-nothing friends will even consider lending him money. In desperate need of cash, Willard resolves to steal it from a rich client of Martin's. He uses his army of rats to spook Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, and then steals 8,000 dollars from their bedroom.

At home, the mistreated Ben starts to show signs of rebellion. At work, Martin hatches his plan to get the Stiles house, firing Willard and Joan. Then, to make matters worse, Martin discovers Socrates

in the records room and bludgeons him to death. Avenging the death of his best friend, Willard and his army of rats pay Martin a visit at the office one night. Willard orders the rats to tear the bastard up, and they do. Horrified by his own actions, Willard decides it is time to cut bait. He abandons Ben and the rats at the office and drives home. Then, he drowns all of the rats at the house, destroying any evidence of his army of rodents. Ben is not about to be ignored, however. With his own army of rats, Ben finds his way home. Rather than make peace with Ben and the rats, Willard attempts to poison them with arsenic. For the intelligent Ben, this is the last straw, and the rats turn on their former master.

COMMENTARY: Though preceded by Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, *Willard* is the film that began the "when animals attack" craze of the early '70s. It was a whopping (and unexpected) success at the box office, and it is not hard to see why. The film has quite a bit of depth and solid characterization. On the surface it's a tale of revenge, of a boy who trains rats to right the wrongs that the world has inflicted on him. But more than that, *Willard* is about the cycle of abuse. The film ultimately realizes that its protagonist, Willard Stiles, is no better than its villain, Martin.

The first half of the film spends a great deal of time depicting Willard Stiles' bleak, hopeless existence. He lives with his crazy mother, who he takes care of night and day. She is a nag who is constantly prodding him about something ("you're letting everything go," she complains from the comfort of her bed). Martin fills in, unfortunately, as Willard's father: the male authority figure in his life. Martin takes special pleasure in humiliating and embarrassing the boy, and it is no wonder that Willard feels empty and of no use. He takes a bus to work, and everybody tells him what to do and when to do it. He is psychologically abused by everyone from his mother and Martin (whose desk is decorated with a sign which reads "Do Unto Others Before They Do Unto You"...) to his mother's nosey friends. And the responsibilities! He has to keep the house up; he has to pay taxes; he has to go to work; he has to bring work home after hours. It's a miserable, unhappy life and Willard feels he has no control over it.

At this critical juncture, Willard starts to befriend the rats.

Interestingly, this is the one point in the story where he could have opted to be kind and decent. But instead, Willard realizes he can be cruel to the rats, since he trains them and has control over them. Sadly, the cycle of abuse continues, and Willard opts to control the rats much the way Martin and his mother try to control him. The rat who takes the brunt of this abuse is the black one, Ben. While love and rewards are lavished on the white Socrates, Ben is treated like a poor cousin. "I'm the boss here!" Willard warns the rat, sounding like a carbon copy of Martin, the man he hates. Ben, though smart, is not allowed to sleep in the bed with Willard, like Socrates. And, he is unduly punished when he disappoints his master. Thus Willard does to Ben as Martin did unto him, and the miserable cycle continues.

For a time, Ben obeys his master, but then Willard grows even crueller (as Martin became increasingly cruel). Willard even abandons Ben at the scene of the crime, and then murders all of his rat brothers. Ironically, the cycle of abuse and hate goes one more round: Ben, fed up, turns on Willard. As he dies, Willard tells Ben that he was "good to him," a comment that the arrogant Martin might have made while begging for his own life.

Beyond being a personal story of abuse perpetuated from one generation to another, there are racial undertones in the film. Is it of any significance that the favored rat, Socrates, is white, and the abused, less favored rat (Ben), is black? While the white Socrates is given a life of comfort in the bedroom, black Ben must toil in the basement as a slave, used by his master for terrible purposes. Thus *Willard* might also be seen to be a bizarre comment on Civil Rights. When Ben fights against his benevolent master (who claims he was "good to him" in the manner of so many plantation-owning Southerners), he is rising up against a system that has judged him not as good as his white brother. That may be stretching the matter a bit, but it seems to fit.

Indeed, in the sequel, *Ben*, all the rats rebel against the human society (representing their masters), causing violent riots in the streets. Not surprisingly, they are repelled by fire hoses ... an ever present symbol of white repressive authority in the Civil Rights movement.

If that's stretching the issue, no matter. The point of *Willard* is that it can be read as more than a simple horror movie wherein rats attack people. It is a story of the disenfranchised rising up against those who have mistreated them. Though it may sound insulting to compare rodents to humans (specifically humans of color), one must again remember the era. Fantasy films about race relations were coming out by the droves in the 1970s, and there have been significant books about the racial implications of the *Planet of the Apes* series. If simians can represent or signify minorities, so then too can rats. And, it is a fact that *Willard* and *Ben* were disproportionately popular in inner city movie theaters. The disenfranchised of those neighborhoods were able to empathize with the disenfranchised animals of the film, even though they were "rats."

But the joy of this movie, and indeed, of most really good movies reviewed in this book, is that they can also be seen simply as what they are: ripping good horror pictures. The scenes of rats swarming in *Willard* are highly effective, and realistic. And Davison is in close proximity to the animals in much of the film. Really, it's all rather astounding. The Stiles house, teeming with hundreds of rats, is an image one is not likely to soon forget.

Of all the rat attack scenes, only Martin's death seems weak. In this case it looks uncomfortably like stagehands are simply throwing rats on him. But otherwise, the rats are great actors, and an effective threat. Some mention should also go to Bruce Davison, who acts his heart out to make a memorable and interesting character. Most horror movies don't feature such a well-defined, deeply delineated character. In *Willard*, we feel his pain, and we hate the fact that, in the end, he becomes what he despised. *Willard* is the best of the best 1970s "animal" pack because it is about people, not critters, and how they fail to escape the prison of their lives.

LEGACY: *Willard* was the surprise hit of 1971, grossing more than \$8.2 million, and setting off an "animals attack" sub-genre that would come to include its own sequel, *Ben* (1972), *Frogs* (1972), *Stanley* (1972), *Sssssss* (1973), *Night of the Lepus* (1972), *Squirm* (1976), *Day of the Animals* (1977), *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977)

and others. For actor Bruce Davison, *Willard* offered a high-profile leading role that propelled his career to critical accolades (*Longtime Companion* [1990]), and cult popularity (*The X-Men* [2000]). *Willard* is being re-made for a 2003–2004 release.

1972

Asylum (1972) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Smith); Britt Ekland (Lucy); Herbert Lom (Byron); Patrick Magee (Dr. Rutherford); Barry Morse (Bruno the Tailor); Barbara Parkins (Bonnie); Robert Powell (Dr. Martin); Charlotte Rampling (Barbara); Sylvia Syms (Ruth); James Villiers (George); Geoffrey Bayldon (Max); Ann Firbank (Anna); Meg Jenkins (Miss Higgins); John Franklyn-Robbins (Stubbins); Sylvia Marriott, Daniel Jones, Frank Forsyth, Richard Todd, Tony Wall.

CREW: Harbor Productions Inc. Presents an Amicus Production, *Asylum*. *Director of Photography:* Denys Coop. *Art Director:* Tony Curtis. *Editor:* Peter Tanner. *Production Manager:* Teresa Bolland. *Assistant Director:* Anthony Waye. *Camera Operator:* Neil Binney. *Continuity:* Pamela Davis. *Casting Director:* Ronnie Curtis. *Chief Make-up:* Roy Ashton. *Chief Hairdresser:* Joan Carpenter. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Bridget Sellers. *Sound Mixer:* Norman Bolland. *Sound Editor:* Clive Smith. *Dubbing Mixer:* Robert Jones. *Set Dresser:* Fred Carter. *Titles:* G.S.E. Ltd. *Color:* Technicolor. *Music composed, arranged and conducted by:* Douglas Gamley. *Executive Producer:* Gustave Berne. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg, Milton Subotsky. *Written by:* Robert Bloch. *Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker. Produced at Shepperton Studios, Shepperton, Middlesex, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 95 minutes

NOTE: *Asylum* features four stories by Robert Bloch in the following order: “Frozen Fear,” The Weird Tailor,” “Lucy Comes to Stay” and

“Mannikins of Horror.”

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Martin visits Dunsmoor Asylum for the incurably insane, and learns that the head psychiatrist, Dr. Starr, has gone crazy. Martin is offered a job at the asylum, but only if he can determine which of four disturbed patients is actually Dr. Starr. He accepts the conditions, and is led upstairs to the patient rooms by an orderly named Max.

The first patient Martin sees is named Bonnie. He listens as she tells of her adulterous relationship with a man married to a woman versed in African voodoo and superstition. Bonnie recalls how her lover, Walter, chopped up his wife with a hatchet and stuffed her body parts in a basement freezer. Walter was then killed when the body parts, working independently, attacked and murdered him. Bonnie arrived at the scene of the crime some time later, and was also confronted by the murderous limbs of Walter's wife. Dr. Martin concludes that the scarred Bonnie is actually a paranoid psychotic.

Moving on, Dr. Martin meets Bruno, a tailor. Bruno soon reveals his story. He recounts how a strange man named Smith visited his shop and asked him to sew a suit out of an odd reflective material. Bruno did not know it at the time, but the suit was designed to re-animate the corpse of Smith's son! In a scuffle over payment, Mr. Smith was killed, and Bruno stole his book of the occult only to find that the strange suit could ... and did ... bring life to a store mannequin.

In his third case, Dr. Martin consults with Barbara, who claims she is not ill at all. She tells of a friend named Lucy who murdered her brother and a nurse with scissors. Martin quickly learns that the murderous Lucy is actually Barbara's alter ego.

Finally, Dr. Martin meets Dr. Byron, a strange fellow who creates perfect little figurines that he claims are alive. His final creation is a miniature version of himself, right down to the correct placement of internal organs. Byron believes he can will his mind into the toy body, and sets out to do just that.

Dr. Martin is tired of playing games, and tells Mr. Rutherford, the man that offered him the job in the first place, that he will have none of it. At the same time, Byron is successful at transferring his

soul into the little toy figure. The doll escapes its cell unnoticed, even as Martin refuses to name the disturbed patient he believes is Starr. The doll then stabs Rutherford in the neck, killing him in Martin's sight. Martin destroys the doll ... and it bleeds! Before Martin can make his escape from this most strange asylum, he discovers the identity of Dr. Starr. This discovery costs Dr. Martin his life...

COMMENTARY: *Asylum* is a good horror anthology that plays out a bit like a shaggy dog joke. The premise sounds like something one might overhear at a bar: a doctor goes to an asylum and visits four patients, trying to figure out which one of them is the former head psychologist... It's a workable scenario, and an opportunity to unify the four stories by Robert Bloch, author of *Psycho* (the novel). Of the four stories, the first and second are probably strongest.

"Frozen Fear" may be the best of the four tales. A chopped-up body tries to wriggle its way out of a basement freezer, much to the dismay of the murderer. The terror begins when a decapitated head appears on the floor just beyond the basement door, a spectral warning that reality is not as it seems. From there, it becomes a multipronged (or limbed) attack, as various body parts attack the murderer, Walter. A hand reaches out of the freezer and strangles Walter in a jolting moment, and the horror is simultaneously funny and scary.

The second story, "The Weird Tailor" is more an acting set piece, a two-man confrontation between Peter Cushing, and *Space: 1999*'s Barry Morse. Rather than being an out-and-out horror escapade (as was "Frozen Fear"), the second story is more deliberate, more suspenseful, more involved, and it builds a sense of anticipation. Only the ending is a letdown.

Story #3, "Lucy Comes to Stay," though glittering with the beauty of both Britt Ekland and Charlotte Rampling, is the weakest story of the bunch. It is a garden-variety psycho story about a schizophrenic murderess. The audience is way ahead of the filmmakers on this one, realizing early on that Ekland's oft-referred-to imaginary friend is but the inner voice of a tormented woman.

Finally, "Mannikins of Horror" (which was later remade on the first

season of the Laurel TV anthology *Monsters*), puts *Asylum* back on track, with surprise and horror as a crazy doctor constructs a murderous little homunculus. Herbert Lom is effective as the psycho, and though the murderous doll is but a wind-up robot, the horror scenes are strangely frightening. It's more than a bit disturbing to see a malevolent wind-up toy work its way through the asylum and commit murder.

The wraparound pieces, involving Dr. Martin, tend to be pretty effective. Director Roy Ward Baker's camera is careful to capture the disturbing artwork on the walls of the asylum: portraits of bizarre, insane-seeming caricatures. These works seems to indicate that the building itself is filled with evil, a nice touch that paves the way for the supernatural stories. When Ward is ready to transition from wraparound to flashback, his camera focuses on a black-and-white sketch, and then spins about. It's as if the glimpse of artistic insanity has spurred the camera to go crazy itself. That's a good transition tool, because the film is taking the audience from the normal world (ostensibly), to the world of the deranged.

Though *Asylum* is a well-crafted horror anthology, it is unlikely that it will appeal to today's younger genre fans. The stories are rather short and undeveloped, especially considering the recent history of such anthologies as *Tales from the Crypt*, *Monsters*, and *Tales from the Darkside*, and none of the stories stands out as being an overwhelming highpoint. Droll but so-so.

***The Asphyx* (1972) * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Robert Stephens (Hugo); Robert Powell (Giles); Jane Lapotaire (Christina); Fiona Walker (Anna); Alex Scott (President); Terry Scully (Pauper); Ralph Arliss (Clive); John Lawrence (Mason); David Grey (Vicar); Tony Caunter (Warden); Paul Bacon (First Member).

CREW: A Peter Newbrook film. *Production Designer:* John Stoll. *Production Manager:* Ted Sturgis.

Assistant Director: Roger Simons. *Continuity:* Phyllis Crocker. *Camera Operator:* Chris Holden. *Make-up:* Jimmy Evans. *Hairstylist:* Stephanie Kay. *Costumes:* Evelyn Gibbs. *Set Decorator:* Arthur Taksen. *Special Effects:* Ted Samuels. *Editor:* Maxine Julius. *Sound Effects:* Peter Bond. *Sound Supervisor:* John Cox. *Recordist:* Ken Ritchie. *Re-recording:* Bob Jones. *Music Composed and conducted by:* Bill McGuffie. *Filmed in:* TODD AO-35. *Director of photography:* Freddie Young. *Associate Producer:* Maxine Julius. *Screenplay:* Brian Comport. *Based on an original idea "The Asphyx" by:* Christina and Lawrence Beers. *Produced by:* John Brittany. *Directed by:* Peter Newbrook. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Sir Hugo, a photographer interested in psychical research, photographs the dead and dying as a hobby. Strangely, a variety of his pictures taken at the precise moment of expiration reveal an odd smudge. A society of researchers believe it is a representation of the soul leaving the body. Hugo is not so sure.

One day, while vacationing on the lake with his family, Hugo's son Clive and Hugo's wife are killed during a boating accident while Hugo is filming them with a new "moving picture" (film) contraption. After a period of mourning, Hugo develops the film, and detects a moving shadow near Clive at the moment of his death. Furthermore, it seems to be moving towards, not away, from him as the soul ostensibly would. Hugo becomes obsessed with understanding the phenomenon. He comes to believe that the smudge is actually a spirit of death that the Greeks called an "asphyx." Did it possess his son at the moment he died? Did it somehow rob him of life?

Since the asphyx seems to manifest itself only when mortals are in real danger of death, Hugo tests his theory during a public hanging. He films the execution, and utilizes a machine he has developed, which renders the asphyx visible to all the bystanders in the audience. Furthermore, he records it on film. Despite his success, Hugo is unnerved because he feels the asphyx saw him ... and that

it actually has a malevolent intelligence.

With the assistance of his daughter's beau, Giles, Sir Hugo sets about to capture the asphyx, using a guinea pig as the endangered life form. The attempt is successful, and with its asphyx captured, the guinea pig will never die. It has attained immortality because the spirit of death is trapped in a bottle!

The next "guinea pig" is a human being, a poor wretch from Bede House who is dying of tuberculosis. Sir Hugo believes that by capturing the man's asphyx, he can restore him to health, and even grant him eternal life. During the experiment, the ungrateful wretch splashes acid on Hugo's face, and the operation fails.

The accident in the lab gets Hugo thinking. He desires to be immortal, so he asks Giles to trap his asphyx for him. Giles is a reluctant partner in this experiment, but his father-in-law-to-be is most persuasive. After devising a method of slow electrocution to "kill" himself (and force the asphyx to appear), Giles and Hugo capture the entity. Giles locks it away in a safe that only he knows the combination to. Buoyed by his success, Hugo decides that his daughter Christina must also live forever. He wants to trap her asphyx. Christina and Giles are dead set against the plan, which will put Christina in danger of death, but Hugo promises he will give them his blessing to marry if they agree to his plan. The experiment proceeds, and Christina is unexpectedly decapitated when it fails. A furious Hugo, damned to eternal guilt and eternal regret at the death of his daughter, plans to release his own asphyx, and die himself. Embittered, Giles refuses to help. He kills himself in the next experiment, leaving Hugo without the means (and the lock combination!) to free his asphyx.

One hundred years later, Hugo is still alive ... ancient, twisted ... but living ... and still atoning for his crimes.

COMMENTARY: This is one case where premise trumps execution. The norm in the horror genre is to obsess on style, mood, art direction and even special effects to the exclusion of logic, common sense, and sometimes, humanity. Believability is often sacrificed at the altars of shock, suspense, or gore. *The Asphyx* is an interesting anomaly because it has the opposite problem. It is directed with

ham-handed earnestness, and a general lack of style, yet its premise is so powerful, so appealing, that the film actually surmounts its stylistic miscues.

So many horror movies obsess on the fear of dying, of attempting to escape death before it strikes. *Final Destination* (2000) is one notable example. Yet few films genuinely explore what happens to the human essence at the time of death—when the grim reaper actually strikes. *The Asphyx* focuses solely on that moment, and posits that there is an entity, a bizarre creature, which brings death to all humans at times of extreme danger. The film then makes the logical leap that if this personal demon can be captured, a person will be immortal, freed to live forever. It is a fascinating concept, and *The Asphyx* mines it for its story about mortality and morality.

Perhaps the above paragraph makes *The Asphyx* sound purely philosophical, and less than involving. That's an incorrect assumption. The concept of the film is couched in an intriguing way, in a great personal story of human invention, and frailty. Think about the concept this way: What if Kodak developed a new brand of film for cameras that, as an unexpected side effect of its chemical properties, captured the presence of ghosts? Once this "side effect" has been established, *The Asphyx* then examines, in moral terms, what such a discovery would mean.

Not surprisingly, *The Asphyx*, for much of its length, echoes the storyline of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Because he has lost a son and a wife, Hugo, a man of science and social standing, becomes obsessed with death. Like Victor Frankenstein, Hugo believes that if he can accomplish just one thing (in this case catching the asphyx of each of his loved ones), they never need die. The film then provides the requisite argument that life and death should remain in the hands of the deity, not man. "It's wrong," Christina declares of immortality. "We're merely creatures of God, not God!" Yet the obsessed Hugo cannot stop, and his gradual loss of balance and perspective echoes Frankenstein's development into a psychotic. Finally, in the end, Hugo, like Frankenstein, creates a process whereby he kills those he loves, the very people who should benefit from his discovery. So, even while exploring a fascinating premise, *The Asphyx* pays homage to a classic horror story, again warning

about the dangers of science's overreaching.

Like Frankenstein, Hugo pays quite a price for his actions. Since his asphyx is trapped away, never to be released, Hugo goes on eternally. His punishment (which is much less merciful than the death penalty he objects to so vehemently in the film) is eternal torment. He will live forever with a mistake, knowing that he killed his own daughter. Here the film reaches a new moral plateau beyond the obvious confines and "don't tamper in God's domain" didacticism of the Frankenstein story.

Finally, in the end, with no asphyx to permit death, there's no individual choice. Even when life is miserable, there is no opportunity to die. Fate is taken out of human hands, and the picture ultimately states that it is important for humans to have the ability to self-terminate. It is an unpleasant truth, but one that is important. Is eternal life, spent in misery, preferable to death? And, is eternal life responsible? Is not a primary human responsibility in life the decision to relinquish control of the world to the next generation, to our children, and our children's children? *The Asphyx* raises all of these moral issues in clever ways.

The Asphyx effectively deals with all of its concepts, even the frightening, genre ones. A large component of its outline involves a Lovecraftian tenet. It speculates, in essence, that a horrid, screeching monster with malevolent intelligence exists side by side with man, just outside his field of vision. This thing is visible by a fluke and is discovered by accident. Like the old ones waiting outside our dimension, these creatures have the ability to affect our world, and that's a really scary thought, as is the "newly discovered" cause of death. Man expires, *The Asphyx* tells us, because an invisible creature preys on us. There is no such thing as "natural causes"; all deaths are generated by a malevolent, *thinking* thing.

Buoyed by so many great ideas, *The Asphyx* is thought provoking almost in spite of itself. It has a compelling moral conflict, and a great premise, even though it is undercut at times by some clumsy visualization. The special-effects depiction of the asphyx, for instance, reduces the awe and power one feels at the nature of such a creature. The spirit of death is represented by a primitive optical

effect that at time looks like a floating mutant shrimp! But, perhaps it is too much to ask that a film be literate, challenging and possessed of top-notch special effects. Like the best of its genre, *The Asphyx* articulates questions about the nature of life and death, and the morality surrounding our understanding of those concepts. The special effects, weak as they are, aren't terribly important.

The Baby

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ruth Roman (Mrs. Wadsworth); Anjanette Comer (Ann Gentry); Marianna Hill (Germaine); Michael Pataki (Dennis); David Manzy (The Baby).

CREW: *Directed by:* Ted Post. *Written by:* Abe Polsky. *Produced by:* Elliott Feinman, Ralph Hirsch, Abe Polsky, Milton Polsky. *Director of Photography:* Michael Margulies. *Editor:* Bob Crawford Senior. *Music:* Gerald Fried. *M.P.A.A Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 84 minutes.

DETAILS: A surprised social worker finds a family taking care of a very strange “child” in this disturbing, off-kilter film. The social worker attempts to liberate the “infant” (a 21-year-old mental simpleton) from its mother (Roman), but there is a surprise twist in the tale. Recently released on DVD.

Baron Blood (1972) * *

Critical Reception

“Under Mario Bava’s pedestrian direction the concocted creaking, screaming, gory murders and Miss Sommer’s frightened racing through dark passageways largely add up to a spectral schlock.”—A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, February 8, 1973, page 36.

“Strengths include some great location shooting,

fine cinematography and a cameo appearance by Joseph Cotten.”—Anthony Tomlinson, *Shivers* # 30, June 1996, page 27.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joseph Cotten (Alfred Becker); Elke Sommer (Eva Arnold); Massimo Girotti (Karl Hummel); Rada Rassimov (Christine Hoffman); Antonio Cantafora (Peter Kleist); Humi Raho (Police Inspector); Alan Collins (Fritz); Dieter Tressler (Herr Dortmunat).

CREW: Alfred Leone Presents *Baron Blood*.
Executive Producers: Sam Lang, J. Arthur Elliot.
Original Story and Screenplay: Vincent Fotre.
Adapted for the Screen by: William A. Bairn. *Music:* Stelvio Cipriani. *Produced by:* Alfred Leone. *Directed by:* Mario Bava. *Lighting:* Antonio Rinaldi. *Art Director:* Enzo Bulgarelli. *Editor:* Carlo Reali.
Cameraman: Emilio Varriano. *Make-up:* Silyana Petri. *Assistant Director:* Lamberto Bava. *Special Effects:* Franco Tocci. *Hairdresser:* Rossana Gigante.
Production Manager: Bruno Fasca. A Leone International Production in Association with Cinevision, Ltd. Filmed in Technicolor. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: American Peter Kline arrives in Austria and meets his Uncle Karl. He has traveled across the world to learn the truth about an ancestor on his father's side known as "Baron Blood," a sadist who reveled in the torture of others. He goes to visit the baron's castle (known as the Castle of Devils...) and learns it is being restored for sale. Overseeing the operation is a beautiful blond woman, Ava, whom Peter befriends. Living in the castle is Fritz, a slightly bonkers groundskeeper. Soon, Paul reveals why he has really come. In his possession is a document created by a witch named Elizabeth Holly, a document which is purported to have the power to resurrect Baron Blood!

By night, Peter and Ava steal into the castle and recite the resurrection incantation. They read aloud from the parchment, and almost immediately, a bell tolls indicating the baron has awakened. When a rattling is heard somewhere upstairs, Peter and Ava panic and revoke the incantation. The house is silent again, but Ava remains shaken.

The next day, work progresses on the castle, and Peter and Ava return in search of a secret passage. They find it, and the baron's secret room beyond. They resolve to try the incantation again that night. They do so, and deep within the castle, the baron awakens. Ava begs Peter to send the baron back to oblivion again, but the parchment has fallen into the fireplace and can no longer be referenced.

Awake for the first time in centuries, the disfigured baron leaves the castle for a nearby clinic. He kills the doctor there, and then murders one of Ava's close friends. Police suspect a run-of-the-mill murder, but Ava and Peter fear the baron is responsible.

The baron's castle is sold at auction, and the winning man is a crippled fellow named Becker. He asks Ava's assistance in further restoring the castle. Ava and Peter tell Becker the curse of the baron, but he brushes it off. By night, Ava is pursued through the house by a dark figure she believes to be Baron Blood. Peter rescues Ava, but the Baron persists in coming after her.

Realizing the depth of their danger, Peter and Ava seek the assistance of a clairvoyant named Christina Hoffman. She is a medium, and is fearful of the baron. She informs them that the baron wants them dead because only they have the power to send him back to oblivion. Then, Hoffman presents Peter and Ava with a medallion owned by Elizabeth Holly, the witch who destroyed the baron the first time.

Before long, Peter and Ava have returned to the castle. Becker shows them the newly restored dungeon, and then reveals his true identity as the baron! Peter and Ava try to use the medallion, but he refers to it as a trinket. He tortures them, starting with Peter, but Ava remembers part of the incantation, and that the medallion can resurrect Baron Blood's victims. One at a time, those victimized by

the baron return from the dead, and the baron is forced to suffer for his crimes all over again.

COMMENTARY: “I would not play with the occult, if I were you,” one of the characters in Mario Bava’s *Baron Blood* warns. That’s good advice, for this is a film in which the evil dead, awakened by a resurrection incantation, threaten the living. Unfortunately, the film is rather dull, and not particularly scary, revealing little of the psychological depth or cinematic style of Bava’s *A Hatchet for the Honeymoon*.

Part of the problem is that warning. All the characters ignore it, and so this becomes one of those predictable horror tales in which hip, attractive youngsters fool with a power beyond their comprehension and are made to pay the price for such irreverence. The error is compounded in *Baron Blood* when the hip idiots in question (Ava and Peter) resurrect the sadistic baron not once, but twice. They just don’t learn from their mistakes, do they?

Baron Blood loses points in other regards, besides character motivation. The translated dialogue is atrocious, obvious and inartistic. “There is something terrible and horrifying out there and we have released it!” one character breathlessly declares, helping sleeping viewers catch up on the plot. “You really had a terrifying experience,” another character tells Elke Sommer, after she has been attacked ... as though she were not smart enough to figure that out for herself. Still, at least Sommers seems invested in the ludicrous action. Contrarily, Joseph Cotten gives a rote, unmenacing performance that might as well have been phoned in.

But the main disappointment of the film is that it could have been so much better if just a little more thought had gone into it. The core of the picture should have been Peter’s interest in the baron. Why is he so fascinated by the evil of this particular ancestor? The film could have explored the reasons that good, normal people are sometimes drawn to evil and destruction. Another scene suggests another tack Bava could have taken if inclined to really contemplate his material. There is an effective scene wherein a man is killed at a soda machine that has been brought into the ancient mansion/hotel. That is an interesting juxtaposition of the past and present, and the ramifications of the baron’s home becoming a vacation

resort could have been mined for a little irony. Sadistic past versus commercial present, and all that. But no, not here. That would have been too clever.

The real problem with *Baron Blood* is that it feels diluted, like a sequel to a better film—a latter entry in the *Hellraiser* or *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, perhaps. The Baron is not terribly frightening, though one feels he could have been with a little bit of tweaking, and his antics seem vaguely familiar, and vaguely rote ... like it's all been done before. There are some nice images, like the foggy blue exteriors where lots of light shines through tree branches, but most of the film feels off-key. Even the color of the blood drops is wrong—too pink. A little more care could have resulted in smarter characters, better dialogue, a scarier villain, a more interesting theme, and the right color blood. This movie is a primary example of why so many horror films are not taken seriously by critics. Rather than actively face its real subject matter (the allure of evil), *Baron Blood* settles for lazy situational logic and plotting. It is all bells and whistles, when it could have been meaningful and scary.

***Ben* (1972) * * ½**

Critical Reception

“The way in which you respond to *Ben* will depend on a number of variables, including how you feel about the possibility of Los Angeles shutting down, trick photography, dreadful acting, the decline and fall of Phil Karlson as a director and a screenplay that never has the courage to acknowledge its comic impulses.”—*New York Times*, June 24, 1972.

“...starts off briskly ... but then tends to sink into a fairly maudlin relationship between the sick boy and the lead rat.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 18.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joseph Campanella (Cliff Kirtland); Arthur

O'Connell (Billy Hatfield); Rosemary Murphy (Beth Garrison); Meredith Baxter (Eve Garrison); Kaz Garas (Joe Green); Lee Harcourt Montgomery (Danny Garrison); Norman Alden (Policeman); Paul Carr (Kelly); James Luisi (Ed); Kenneth Tobey (Engineer); Richard Van Vleet (Reade); Lee Paul (Carey); Scott Garrett (Henry Gray); Arlen Stuart (Mrs. Gray); Richard Drasin (George).

CREW: From Cinerama Releasing and BCP—A Service of the Cos Broadcasting Company. *Director of Photography:* Russell Metty. *Art Director:* Rolland M. Brooks. *Unit Production Manager/Assistant Director:* Floyd Joyer. *Animals Trained by:* Moe Di Sesso. *Marionettes by:* Rene. *Casting:* Irving Lande. *Set Decorator:* Antony Mondello. *Chief Electrician:* Earl Williaman, Jr. *Head Grip:* Dick Borland. *Construction Coordinator:* Ed Shanley. *Special Effects:* Bud David. *Properties:* William Waness. *Script Supervisor:* Joan Evemin Buck. *Make-up:* Jack H. Young. *Hairstylist:* Hazel Washington. *Costumes:* Ray Harp, Mina Mittelman. *Post-Production Supervisor:* Houseley Stevenson. *Sound Editor:* James J. Klinger. *Music Editor:* Jack Tillar. *Sound Recording:* Leon M. Leon, David Dockendorf. *Recorded by:* Glenn-Glenn Sound. *Color:* DeLuxe. *Second Unit Photography and Photography Effects:* Howard A. Anderson Co. *Film Editor:* Harry Gerstad. *Associate Producer:* Joel Briskin. *Music:* Walter Scharf. “Ben’s Song” and “Start the Day” lyrics by: Don Black, Music by: Walter Scharf. “Ben’s Song” sung by: Michael Jackson. *In charge of production operations:* John E. Pommer. *Executive Producer:* Charles A. Pratt. *Based on characters created by:* Stephen Gilbert. *Written by:* Gilbert A. Ralston. *Produced by:* Mort Briskin. *Directed by:* Phil Karlson. A Cinerama Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 97 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Police in L.A. investigate the death of Willard Stiles, the strange young man who was murdered by his army of rats and its

leader, Ben. The police discover a diary detailing Ben's training at Willard's hands, and attempt to prevent a public panic about rats. Two officers remain at the crime scene until late in the night, and are murdered when they discover Ben and his hidden army of vermin.

The rats spread out across the neighborhood, using the sewers as a subway system of sorts, and Ben meets a little boy with a heart condition named Danny. Danny performs puppet shows about Ben, and the two become fast friends even as Ben's rats attack a truck delivering fish and poultry. Danny's mother and older sister (Eve) think Danny has a new imaginary friend when he sings "Ben's Song," a melody about his new friend. Meanwhile, the rats attack a grocery store and lay waste to it. Danny learns of Ben's nocturnal activities, and scolds the rat for organizing so much destruction, but Ben is still stinging from his cruel treatment at Willard's hands.

The police comb the neighborhood and Danny's house for rats. Danny hides Ben in a shoebox to conceal him, and then teaches him how to avoid poison rat-traps. When a neighborhood bully attacks Danny, Ben and the rats respond in kind—biting and attacking the bully. Before long, the rats also overrun a nearby candy factory and a gymnasium.

Growing more trustful, Ben takes Danny to the sewer where the rats hide. Danny sneaks into the tunnels and sees thousand of rats hidden there. He returns home and spends the night sleeping peacefully in his room until Eve sees rats on his bed and panics. The police question Danny and he is uncooperative with them, but they search the storm drains to find the rats.

The police cordon off the sewers, and Danny races inside the tunnels to warn his friends of imminent danger, with Eve in hot pursuit. Danny finds Ben and begs him to leave before it is too late. The police use flamethrowers to burn out the rats and an all-out battle occurs in the sewers. Eve and Danny escape the tunnels as hoses are used to flush the animals out. The police catch the rats in the ensuing crossfire, and the battle is lost for Ben.

Sometime later, Ben shows up at Danny's house, beaten but not dead. Danny tends to his friend, and Ben lives to fight another day.

COMMENTARY: Before *Stuart Little* (1999) charmed the hearts of little tykes across America, there was *Ben*. This film is a sequel to 1971's unexpected hit *Willard*, but very few characters from the first film return for this one ... since Ben (inconveniently) killed most of the humans at the end of the original picture. Instead, Ben, that scamp of a rat, returns to befriend a little sick boy with a bad heart.

As a film, *Ben* is simultaneously pulled in contrary directions. On one hand, the film goes to great lengths to depict rat attacks (or rather, rat riots, since the attacks are not directed at people usually). Indeed, there are many more rat confrontations in this sequel than were in *Willard*. Yet, on the other hand, the film also takes special pains to stress the cloying, sappy and irritating emotional bond between Danny and Ben. It makes for an odd combination as the film crosscuts from scenes of extreme property destruction and violence to tender dialogue sequences with children and puppet shows. It's *The Yearling* meets *King Kong*, or some other unholy blend of crap. Not surprisingly, the mix doesn't work.

Also, it is clear that the tendency of this sequel, like so many sequels, is to edge further towards camp, towards humor, when there is no real human or legitimate way to further the story of the progenitor. *Willard* was a serious, straight-faced, and effective horror film about a disenfranchised young man and his "revolt" against society (using rats). When his army of rats was dispatched to attack people, it was serious business. In *Ben*, not so. The rats attack a grocery store, and the audience sees the little buggers chowing down on Kellogg's Frosted Flakes ("*They're Greeeeeat!*"). The rats attack a health center and are seen running on an exercise conveyer belt while a surprised client (in leotard) doubletakes at the rascally antics.

Yet, the rat stunts are amazing. As if in military formation, rats dash through a maze of pipes in a sewer, obey commands, run and jump, brave fire and water, and perform other tasks that would seem beyond the limits of rodent behavior. It is all rather well done (especially considering there was no such thing as CGI in 1972). The effects are impressive, but the rat attacks themselves have lost their bite.

And, frankly, the reason is because every franchise needs a hero. A

decision was made, prior to production apparently, that Ben and his army of rats were to be the heroes of this particular film. So Ben is now a fella just like Rocky, a little guy bucking the system, aiming for greatness, and just wanting to live his life. It is inherently silly, but the picture is framed that way. If one thinks about it, Ben's heroic journey in this film is almost Biblical in its proportions. After freeing his people (who were enslaved by Stiles), Ben leads them across a body of water (in the sewers) to the promised land (Danny's house; the grocery store). In the end, Ben is betrayed, and the evil police attempt to destroy his army, but he survives to fight another day. Is he a Moses figure? A Christ figure? Or just a furry little four-legger?

Even Campanella's character, the police detective, is completely unsympathetic. He's the villain of the piece, destroying the rats and getting his just deserts. Never mind that he's trying to protect thousands of Los Angelenos from a thousand or so rampaging rats...

So, audience sympathy is overtly with the rats in *Ben*. They may be a health hazard; they may carry diseases; but gosh darn it, they're the best friends a kid could have. That sounds sarcastic, yet there is no doubt that *Ben* is in a different league than *Willard*. This movie represents the "franchise-ization" of a horror concept. *Willard* was about people, about characters and their choices, about their traps, and the cycle of abuse. *Ben* is just playtime with vermin, with a top-40 tune by Michael Jackson thrown in to help sell it. Oddly enough ... and rather embarrassingly, it almost works. This viewer was nonplussed by most of the film as a whole, but became increasingly supportive of the rats as those nasty policemen attempted to eradicate them with superior firepower. And, this reviewer actually felt relief when cuddly little Ben showed up alive and well at the end.

As the end credits rolled, this author felt another bit of relief too, specifically that *Ben* did not generate another sequel. At this rate of concept erosion and canonization, the third film would have seen the United States government hiring Ben and his stalwart rodent army to rescue POWs in Vietnam...

Beware! The Blob!

Cast & Crew

CAST: Robert Walker, Jr. (Bobby); Gwynne Gilford (Lisa); Richard Stahl (Ed); Richard Webb (Sheriff); Godfrey Cambridge (Chester); Carol Lynley (Leslie); With: Larry Hagman, Burgess Meredith, Dick Van Patten, Cindy Williams.

CREW: *Directed by:* Larry Hagman. *Written by:* Richard Clair, Anthony Harris and Jack Harris. *Produced by:* Jack Harris. *Director of Photography:* Al Hamm. *Editor:* Tony De Zarraga. *Music:* Mort Garson. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 87 minutes.

DETAILS: Larry Hagman, J.R. Ewing himself, directed this follow-up to the 1958 cult classic *The Blob*. This time around, the orange jello-mold is played mostly for laughs by a cast of TV stars. The blob surfaces in a barber shop, in an easy chair, and other unlikely locations before finally being put on ice. Brought to the world by Jack Harris, of *Equinox* (1971) and *Dark Star* (1975) fame.

***Blacula* (1972) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...an above-average morality play, due mostly to the talent of the distinguished Shakespearean actor William Marshall.... Black humor and music effectively mask the weak acting of the supporting cast. Suspense, rather than violence, was the keynote.”—Frank Manchel, *An Album of Modern Horror Films*, Franklin Watts, Publisher, 1983 page 19.

“...an awkward mixture of romance, vampire-pic clichés, and shocks (a few effective).”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 36.

“Anybody who goes to a vampire movie expecting sense is in serious trouble and *Blacula* offers less sense than most.”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*, August 26, 1972.

Cast & Crew

CAST: William Marshall (Blacula); Vonetta McGee (Tina/Louva); Denise Nicholas (Michelle); Thalmus Rasulala (Dr. Gordon Thomas); Gordon Pinsent (Lt. Peters); Emily Yancy (Nancy); Lance Taylor, Sr. (Swenson); Logan Field (Barnes); Ted Harris (Bobby); Rick Metzler (Billy); Kitty Lester (Juanita); Charles Macauley (Count Dracula); Jit Cumbuka (Skillet); Elisha Cook (Sam); Eric Brotherson (Real Estate Agent).

CREW: An American International Release. Samuel Z. Arkoff Presents *Blacula*. *Director of Photography:* John M. Stevens. *Art Director:* Walter Herndon. *Executive Producer:* Samuel Z. Arkoff. *Executive Production Supervisor:* Norman T. Herman. *Screenplay by:* Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig. *Producer:* Joseph T. Naar. *Directed by:* William Crain. *Production Manager:* Jack Bohler. *Post-Production Manager:* Salvatore Billitterri. *Locations:* Cinemobile Systems. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Gene Page. “Main Chance” sung by: Billy Page and Gene Page. *Music Coordinator:* Al Simms. *Editor:* Allan Jacobs. *Assistant Editor:* Tom Neff. *Special Effects Editor:* Sam Horta. *Titles Designed by:* Imagic. *Special Effects:* Roger George. *Assistant Director:* Phil Cook. *Wardrobe:* Ermon Sessions and Sandy Stewart. *Camera Operator:* John Kiser. *Hairdresser:* Lola Kemp. *Script Coordinator:* George Fisher. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Services. *Color:* Movie Lab. *Cars furnished by:* Chrysler Corporation of America. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Transylvania in the year 1780, the regal African

prince Mamawaldi and his beautiful wife, Louva, visit with Count Dracula on a diplomatic mission to end the slave trade. When Dracula makes unwanted advances upon Louva, Mamawaldi responds with anger. The count, a vampire, shows his true colors, and an army of the dead attack Mamawaldi. Dracula bites the African prince, dubs him "Blacula," and dooms him to an eternal life of bloodlust as a vampire. Poor Louva is sealed in the tomb where Blacula's locked coffin sits, and there she rots and dies.

Some two hundred years later, Dracula is long dead, and his castle is up for sale. Two gay American antique dealers look the place over and determine that they could make a killing by selling off the count's antiques. Among the items purchased is the coffin of Blacula (still locked), and it is transported back to America.

Once in the United States, Blacula awakens and feeds on the two antique dealers, making them vampire servants. Then, at a funeral for one of the men, Blacula spots a beautiful woman, Tina, who is a dead ringer for his beloved, Louva. Unfortunately, Tina is also a friend of Michelle, who happens to be seeing Dr. Gordon Thomas, a prominent agent for the Scientific Investigation Division of the government. Thomas spies the puncture marks on the neck of the corpse, and refuses to believe the official explanation: that it was a fatal rat bite. He suspects a vampire.

That night, Blacula follows Tina home, and inadvertently scares her. Once she escapes safely, Blacula bites the neck of an obnoxious city cabbie that nearly ran him over in the street. This murder becomes part of Dr. Thomas's investigation, and he seeks the help of white police detective Lt. Peters in exploring his theory that a vampire is responsible.

Mamawaldi courts Tina and tells her that she is the reincarnation of his beloved wife. As strange as this story is, it makes sense to Tina, and she finds herself drawn to this tall, dark stranger. Mamawaldi also reveals that he is a vampire, and that Tina can be with him for all eternity if only she gives herself willingly to him. While Tina considers her future, and Blacula continues to rack up victims (including a beautiful photographer at a local club who has seen that he casts no reflection), Dr. Thomas and Lt. Peters close in on the vampire. Understanding that the coffin is the key to killing the

vampire, the police hunt Blacula down to the antiques warehouse. There they are confronted by an army of the undead, and they use oil burning lamps to start a fire and kill the ghouls.

Though Blacula's minions are dead, the prince himself still prowls the night. He communicates telepathically with Tina, and she obeys his directive to come to him. The police trail Tina to a factory, where she meets Blacula. In the shoot-out that follows, Tina is killed, and Blacula has no choice but to turn her into a vampire so she can live some form of life. Even this reunion of lovers is short-lived, however. Lt. Peters drives a stake through Tina's heart during a battle. Shattered by the loss of his love, Blacula staggers into the daylight and faces his own destruction.

COMMENTARY: To survive from generation to generation legends often change tenor, style and feel. In the 1970s, movie-makers were starting to realize that there were African-American audiences hungry to see many such film legends and styles modulated to reflect their lives in a post-Civil Rights movement 1970s America. Thus was born blaxploitation. Some people see that as a negative term, but the impulse behind the black cinema of the 1970s was actually a positive and even empowering one. Though blacks were appearing in exploitation films of often dubious quality, at least the African-American constituency was being addressed rather than ignored. Hollywood was acknowledging the need to speak meaningfully to the black experience in America, and it paid heed to their wants with a series of Afrocentric films.

Thus black private eyes (*Shaft* [1972]) graced the silver screen, as did African-American re-inventions of the popular monsters. *Blacula* was a dark *Dracula*, *Blackenstein* was an ebony *Frankenstein*, and *Abby* was an African-American reflection of Linda Blair and *The Exorcist* (1973). The most interesting aspect of this re-imagination of the classic monsters is that the classic characters were not only updated for the 1970s, but also altered to specifically mirror the experience of African-Americans in a country where discrimination and racism were still important issues. *Blacula* is probably the best example of this trend, and is fascinating because of the changes it makes to the *Dracula* story.

The film opens with a European white man (*Dracula*) enslaving a

powerful African diplomat, Mamawaldi. That Blacula becomes a monster at all is not his fault. He is captured by Dracula, locked away, and made a vampire against his will. This very experience of becoming a vampire is thus related to the abomination of slavery and the early black experience in the United States. The African slaves who came to America to serve the agricultural South always did so against their will, separated from their families, and forced to serve under harsh white masters who treated them as chattels. Likewise, it is clear that when Dracula re-names Mamawaldi in his own image, as Blacula, the film is equating the white plantation masters with the white vampire master. It is an apt comparison, and one that immediately generates sympathy for Blacula. "Blacula" is Mamawaldi's slave name.

And sympathy is the one facet of his character that separates Blacula from Dracula, Yorga or most other vampires (besides Angel, Spike or Nick Knight). Most vampires in film are depicted as evil, monstrous, and without souls. But Blacula is not that way, at all. He is regal born, decent, honorable and proud ... but betrayed into vampire enslavement. His vampiric entanglements in this film involve not the ruling of the world or a sating of his sexual appetites, but an earnest attempt to win back the wife who was stolen from him by a white master. Again, the specter of slavery is there: Mamawaldi was ruthlessly separated from his beloved wife, and from his family in the northeast of the Nigerian delta. It is no stretch to view him, in fact, as a disenfranchised black man, awakened in a white-dominated world and seeking to re-connect with the heritage that he was robbed of.

Though Dracula's primary opponent is also African-American (Thomas), much of the film nonetheless involves Blacula's clashes with the Caucasian police force. And indeed, Blacula only turns Tina into a vampire when a white policeman shoots her in the back, leaving him no choice but to "turn" her to keep her alive. An act of aggression and conquest in the context of a "white" Dracula has been, in the black cinema, transmuted into an act of mercy, of kindness. That even the ritual taking of the beautiful female, a rite of all screen vampires, is re-packaged in contemporary, ethnic terms, is significant. Blacula does not enjoy making vampires, he does so only because of police brutality ... and that transforms him

into a protagonist, a hero, rather than a villain.

Thomas, the Van Helsing of *Blacula*, is also depicted as combating the white establishment. He suspects a ghoul is at large, and even has evidence of such, but is clearly fighting the bankrupt white police establishment. He can't get permission to exhume a body, and the reports he requests on the matter keep getting lost at the hands of a white man. Because he can't stop *Blacula* sooner (due to these impediments), it is again white America that is to blame for bloody murder. As a black man in a white hierarchy, Thomas's is a voice that, if heard at all, is rarely listened to.

Again, it should be noted that these touches are all handled extremely well. This is not a political film, but merely one which reflects its times and the core concerns of its audience. *Blacula* looks at Thomas and Mamawaldi as two extraordinary men of color who live in a world that does not value them. Remember, a powerful impulse in many horror movies is to create a situation that is believable and identifiable to your audience. *Blacula* does that. It reflects the fear of the African-American audience that they are not heard, not appreciated, and indeed, not even protected, by a police force they do not necessarily trust.

Lest someone believe that *Blacula* is merely a polemic about race, the film is also highly entertaining. William Marshall is one of the all-time great screen vampires, regardless of skin color, and his booming, Shakespearean delivery magnificently captures the regal demeanor, and tragic happenstance, of this once-proud man. Though *Blacula* is hardly what would be considered a scary film today, it is still strong, like so many Hammer films, because it is stylish. When *Blacula* attacks the photographer for instance, he glides suddenly across the room, his arms upraised like batwings. It is a bizarre, surreal moment, but an interesting one nonetheless. The film is energetically performed by all of its principals, who seem fully invested in re-fashioning the Dracula myth for a new time and a contemporary audience. There are bloodcurdling moments aplenty (such as the slow-motion attack by a vampirized cabbie, her fanged mouth gaping), some fine music, and even a touching ending. *Blacula* is a creature of such dignity, a "black prince" as Dracula calls him, that when he has lost all chance of

reclaiming his love, he takes his own life. Rather than giving his enemies the satisfaction of a victory, he courageously faces sunlight, and ends his life. It is a powerful sacrifice, and another moment that speaks to the fact that, though cursed by Dracula, Mamawaldi is a man of noble character.

If *Blacula* fails anywhere, it is in its crude, stereotypical depiction of two gay antique dealers. It seems disingenuous for a film so beautifully reflective of one minority's American experience to then turn around and reinforce the most ridiculous and bigoted views of another disenfranchised group: gay men. These guys are portrayed as mincing, swishy queens, which is funny, but which somehow manages to undercut the grace and style of *Blacula*'s world.

Other flaws are ones typical of low-budget films. We see the same close-up of a police pistol firing at least three times during the climax of the picture. That's a small price to pay, however, for such an enthusiastic re-imagining of a story that had grown stale through infinite repetition and so little variation.

LEGACY: With *Blacula*, the '70s blaxploitation hit horror with a bang. After *Blacula*, one sequel, *Scream Blacula Scream* (1973), followed. The blaxploitation cycle ran its course with AIP's *Blackenstein: The Black Frankenstein* (1973), *Blood Couple* (1973), and 1974's *Abby* (also starring William Marshall), an African-American variation on *The Exorcist*, directed by William Girdler, and *J.D.'s Revenge* (1976). The success of *Blacula* paved the way for other vampires of color, including Eddie Murphy in Wes Craven's *A Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995), and Wesley Snipes' heroic *Blade* (1998).

Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things (1972) * * ½

Critical Reception

"Genuinely weird ... an uneasy combination of comedy and ... *Night of the Living Dead*."—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 31.

"Lamely acted ... and rather weirdly didactic."—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*,

Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 57.

“Indescribable, improbable tale of a repertory theater group, two gay grave robbers, and several bargain basement zombies on an island cemetery. Starring the unforgettable husband-and-wife team of Alan and Anya Ormsby.”—Harry and Michael Medved, *The Golden Turkey Awards*, A Perigee Book, 1980, page 211.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Alan Ormsby (Alan); Valerie Mamche (Kat); Anya Ormsby (Anya); Jeffrey Gillen (Jeff); Jane Daly (Terry); Paul Cronin (Paul); Roy Engleman (Roy); Robert Philip (Emerson); Seth Sklarey (Orville); Bruce Solomon (Vims); Alecs Blair (Caretaker); Robert Sherman, Debbie Cummins, Hester Phebus, Dick Sohmer, Brendan Kenny, Curtis Bryant, Gordon Gillert, Stuart Mitchell, Sandra Laurie, Stephanie Laurie, Jean Clark, Paula Hoffer, Harry Boehme, Robert Smedley, Peter Burke, Lee O'Donnell, Gamille MacDonald, Al McAdams, Carl Richardson, Andy Herbst.

CREW: Geneni Film Distributing Company Presents A Brandywinde Motionarts Film, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*. *Art Director:* Forest Carpenter. *Set Designer:* David Trimble. *Director of Photography:* Jack McGowan. *Musical Score:* Carl Zittner. *Special Make-up Created by and Screenplay Collaboration:* Alan Ormsby. *Film Editor:* Gary Goch. *Second Unit Director of Photography:* Michael McGowan. *Production Manager:* Chris Martell. *Costumer:* Bruce Solomon. *Make-up:* Lee James O'Donnell, Benita Friedman, Judy Whalen. *Camera Operator:* Randy Franken. *Assistant Cameraman:* John McGowan. *Script Supervisor:* Sandy Ulosevich. *Acknowledgments to:* Dade County Department of Parks, City of Miami. *Sound Recording:* Location

Recording Company. *Production Assistant:* Mike Harris, Joe Bonvosu, Oliver Rish. *Titles and Opticals:* The Optical House. *Color:* Capital. *Produced by:* Gary Goch and Benjamin Clark. *Directed and Written by:* Benjamin Clark. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 87 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A group of actors set out for a “burial island” by boat on a dark night. There is an old graveyard on the island, and the leader of the repertory company, Alan, is planning to dig up a dead body as part of a bizarre prank-cum-initiation ritual. The rest of the theatrical group includes Jeff, Kat, Anya, and newcomers Paul and Terry. Paul considers himself the “new Brando” and Terry is intimidated by Alan, who openly expresses his desire to have sex with her.

When the actors reach the island, Alan provides a tour of the cemetery and tells a brief history of the place, reporting that it is “Satan’s sanctum,” and that malevolent forces gather in the dark there. Alan leads his cohorts to the caretaker’s vacant cabin, and inside they find a bathroom teeming with rats. As midnight nears, Alan opens his “sorcerer’s sourcebox” and prepares to summon the dead. Using a grimoire, a spell book, he plans to call forth the dead from their graves. First, however, he forces his companions to exhume the body of a corpse named Orville. Then, suddenly, two zombies attack and the group panics. It is all a prank, however, and the two zombies are really just Emerson and Roy, two flamboyant members of Alan’s troupe who were waiting on the island to pull off the practical joke.

After the others have recovered from his joke, Alan prepares the corpse, Orville, for the summation. He draws the pentagram, the symbol of Satan, atop a coffin and lights the black candles for the dark mass. He summons the dead, but nothing happens. Disappointed, Alan loudly insults Satan and renounces the power of the grimoire. Flustered by Alan’s lousy performance, Kat conducts the same spell in much more dramatic fashion. She calls on the power of Satan and gives the performance of a lifetime. Upstaged by Kat, Alan resolves to re-capture his thunder. He decides to bring Orville back to the caretaker’s cottage for a party. There, he

arranges a sick wedding and is married to Orville in a mock ceremony conducted by Jeff. Terry objects to the proceedings and Anya warns that Orville should be respected, lest he become angry, but Alan is determined to go so far over the top that no one will ever question his commitment to the theater. He even takes Orville to his bedroom and resolves to sleep with the corpse.

Down in the graveyard, the corpses buried there begin to rise. The hungry ghouls feed on Roy and Emerson, and devour the real caretaker of the island, who has been held captive by Alan and the others. Unaware of the events transpiring outside the cabin, the troupe decides to leave Alan and get back to the boat. They are confronted by an army of the dead and are forced to retreat into the cottage as zombies surround the dwelling. The surviving performers barricade the house, but the undead keep walking. Kat, Alan, Jeff and Anya distract the zombies while Paul runs out in the night to retrieve a gun from the boat. Unfortunately, Paul does not make it very far, and is devoured by hungry ghouls. Trying to rescue him, Terry is also dragged away by the ravenous corpses.

Terrified, Alan and the others resolve to perform a counter-ritual that will send the dead back to their graves. Unfortunately, they cannot complete one part of the ritual: they cannot return Orville, the ceremonial corpse, to his grave, because the zombies are all around. Alan conducts the spell anyway, and it seems to drive the zombies back. Relieved, Alan, Anya, Kat and Jeff flee the house. Halfway to the boat, the zombies spring their trap. They have been waiting, and surround the actors. Jeffrey and Kat are devoured by the monsters but Alan and Anya make it back to the cottage. As zombies swarm in after them, a selfish Alan throws them Anya and runs upstairs to a room he hopes is safe.

Alan locks himself in his bedroom only to discover that Orville is there, waiting for him. Alan screams in terror as Orville lunges for him, and the zombies break in.

COMMENTARY: Evil can hide in plain sight, and so can terror. That's one lesson of the ultra-bizarre but not ineffective movie entitled *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*. Much of the suspense generated by the film comes from the ever-present—but unmoving—threat embodied by a character called Orville. Orville is

a corpse, you see, and a bunch of inconsiderate actors have stolen him from his grave, and peaceful slumber, as part of a prank to raise the dead on a so-called “burial” island. The prank fails, apparently, and Orville then functions in the film as a kind of human prop (“He’s my straight-man!” the cruel Alan declares), to be used, abused and debased by the *dramatis personae*. It’s like *Weekend at Bernie’s* (1987) for the cemetery set. All through this portion of the film, the audience waits with a sense of growing dread for Orville’s response to the mockery. It waits for him to come to malevolent, vengeful life. To this movie’s credit, it holds back that eventuality until the last possible moment, and consequently every scene featuring Orville exhibits an underlying, commendable tension. Of course, this is but a variation on Alfred Hitchcock’s old trick (put a bomb under a table ... but don’t let it explode), yet it works well, granting this low budget horror picture a boost in its fear quotient. There Orville sits: exploited, teased, manipulated ... and ostensibly angry. But any minute that situation could change. And finally, horrifically, it does.

The skillful placement of Orville within the film’s action (so that he almost becomes background) is indicative of writer/director Benjamin Clark’s facility at tapping effectively into the horror mythos. Don’t we all fear waking a sleeping juggernaut? Aren’t we all afraid that what should be dead is actually still alive, and watching us? The film plumbs those terrors nimbly, even if overall the movie is darn silly.

What really sinks the movie fastest is a conjunction of two weaknesses: amateurish acting and florid, overly theatrical dialogue. The acting is bad, all right, but even the best and most studied performer would have a hard time mouthing phrases like “the magnitude of your simplitude overwhelms me,” and such. Yet, thematically, this florid dialogue is acceptable because the characters involved are all pompous, self-important acting wannabes, part of a repertory company. As anyone who has ever spent time with fledgling actors is aware, GAS (great actors syndrome) is a real threat, and this film works that syndrome into its narrative. Still, whether the dialogue is valid or not, it is tough on the ears and stagey to the point of absurdity (which just may be the point...). Still, there are not many forms of torture worse than

listening to two amateur performers (playing swishy gay to boot) announce that they've "peed" their pants (four times!!!).

Despite the poor acting, the atrocious dialogue, and only barely coherent editing at times, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* manages to be a rather endearing picture in spite of itself. It operates on a simple (yet distinctly primal) level of nightmare. A group of nasty "children," as the script repeatedly terms the actors, disrespect the dead and are forced to pay a price for their sacrilege. Not unlike an E.C. comic of the 1950s, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* is oddly moral in that it metes out punishment for the wicked, and establishes that there is a higher order of morality, an order of justice (of the eye-for-an-eye variety, no doubt).

Alan, the perpetrator of most of the wrong-headed pranks in the film, is a particularly arrogant sort who demonstrates no respect for the dead, the occult, his fellow man, or even the sanctity of wedding vows. At one especially disgusting juncture, Alan even intimates that he will have sex with Orville's corpse—a perverse desecration that spurs the anger of the "powers that be." Appropriately, Alan is eventually done in by the revived Orville, who waits silently in a bedroom, ready to defile his would-be defiler. It is a moment of just deserts, and a chilling one; it is also satisfying, as the audience has been anticipating (and even desiring) the moment when Orville would spring to life and avenge the wrongs heaped upon him.

Of all of *Night of the Living Dead's* children (zombie movies of the 1970s), *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* seems to have the most distinct and separate ethos. Though the living dead, graveyards, and even a climactic siege on an isolated house are all ingredients transferred from George Romero's seminal cult flick, they are arranged to have different meanings here. *Night of the Living Dead* shows humanity as essentially heroic, even if disorganized and bickering. Ben protected Barbara, engineered an escape (though a failed one), and battled the living dead with an almost innate sense of decency. It wasn't his fault the deck was stacked against him. Such decency is clearly missing from *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, a film which reduces adults to "children," sees man as monstrous and disrespectful, and metes out

supernatural justice. In *Night of the Living Dead*, there is no justice at all; Ben survives the night of the ghouls, but is picked off by trigger-happy rednecks who mistake him for the enemy. Contrast that climax with *Children's*, in which the unpleasant self-important characters get the bruising they have been cruising for all along.

In the final analysis, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* passes the most important of tests for horror movies: it is scary. The isolated burial island, the "sleeping" Orville quiescent amidst the action, and the manner in which the cutting gets faster as Alan summons the dead—thereby working the movie into a visual frenzy—all lend the production a sturdy platform on which to build scares. That the characters are all dinner theater rejects prone to pomposity and lacking redeeming value only adds to the film's moral underpinning and tension. We know these bastards are going to get it for their blatant disrespect of a "higher power," but the fun of *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* is not knowing exactly when justice—and Orville—will awaken from a long slumber.

Countess Dracula

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ingrid Pitt (Countess Elizabeth); Nigel Green (Cap'n); Sandor Eles (Toth); Lesley-Anne Down (Ilona); Maurice Denham (Fabio); Patience Collier (Julia).

CREW: *Directed by:* Peter Sasdy. *Written by:* Jeremy Paul. *Produced by:* Alexander Paal. *Director of Photography:* Ken Talbot. *Film Editor:* Henry Richardson. *Music:* Harry Robinson. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: The legend of Countess Bathory (the subject also of *Daughters of Darkness* [1971]) is the prime focus of *Countess Dracula*. Ingrid Pitt plays the aristocratic vampire that maintains her youth by soaking in the blood of virgins. Try that out, Madge!

Daughters of Satan (1972) * ½

Critical Reception

“A coven of local, modern witches ... entice Miss Grant into satanic shivarees ... so we can have some metaphysical mumbo jumbo, a few obligatory seminude scenes, and explicitly sexy talk.... Miss Grant and Miss Guthrie are photogenic, if little else, and Mr. Selleck ... is natural in his confusion.”—A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, November 2, 1972, page 80.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tom Selleck (James Robertson); Barra Grant (Chris Robertson); Tani Phelps Guthrie (Kitty Duarte); Paraluman (Juana Rios); Vic Silayan (Dr. Dangal); Vic Diaz (Carlos Ching); Gina Laforteza (Andrea); Ben Rubio (Tommy Tantuico); Paquito Salcedo (Mortician); Chito Reves (Guerilla); Bobby Greenwood (Mrs. Postlewaite).

CREW: United Artists presents *Daughters of Satan*. *Camera Operator:* Jun Rasca. *Boom Operator:* Tindy Corpuz. *Chief Electrician:* Julian Baldonado. *Wardrobe:* Vicente Cabrera. *Set Design:* Hernando Palon. *Set Dresser:* Mario Carmona. *Make-up Artist:* Fred C. Blau, Sr. *Assistant Make-up Artist:* Ricardo Villomin. *Hairdresser:* Carmelita Sidson. *Assistant to Producer:* Ann Tait. *Unit Manager:* A. Corpuz. *Assistant Director:* Jose Velasco. *Sound Recordist:* Levy Principe. *Sound:* Glen Glenn Sound. *Sound Effects Editor:* Gene Eliot. *Director of Photography:* Monong Pasca. *Film Editor:* Tony DiMarco. *Color:* DeLuxe. *Music composed and conducted by:* Richard La Salle. *Associate Producer:* Vicente Nayve. *Screenplay:* John C. Higgins. *From a story by:* John Bushelman. *Produced by:* Aubrey Schenck. *Directed by:* Hollingsworth Morse. M.P.A.A. *Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Manila, American art collector James Robertson visits a curio shop called “Treasures of the Orient,” and ends up purchasing a painting of a witchburning (set in the 16th century). He is so interested in the painting because his wife, Christine, resembles the leader of the three witches on the canvas.

The painting disturbs Chris, who is instantly fearful of it. Worse, she seems to recognize the burning depicted on the painting, as one from 1592. Chris even has nightmares about the work of art, and hears someone calling her name.

Before long, figures from the painting are materializing in reality, specifically a devil dog named Nicodemus, and a satanic housekeeper, Juana Rios. James watches Christine change, and with suspicion, attempts to track down the dog’s owner to house #666 on a busy street. He fails to find anything, but is nearly killed by a gang of knife-wielding lunatics, all Satanists out to get him. Jim confides in his psychiatrist, Dr. Dangal, about the situation, and meets one of his other patients, Kitty. Like Juana and Chris, Kitty resembles one of the three witches burned in the painting.

After Dr. Dangal is killed in a suspicious car accident, Jim drives Kitty home from the funeral. She shows him that she owns the third in a series of “The Burning of the Witches” paintings. In this particular piece of art, Robertson sees himself as the head inquisitor. Kitty then tells him of a witches’ vengeance pact: all descendants of the inquisitors have died young. Jim realizes he is related to the inquisitors, and that the people in his life are being possessed by the spirits of the witches. A possessed Chris fails to kill James, and is tortured by a coven of Satanists, the Manila Assembly of Lucifer. She is ordered to spit on a crucifix, is re-confirmed in the faith, and ordered to kill Jim again.

Understandably, Jim wants to move from Manila immediately, but Juana and Chris poison his drink, and knock him unconscious. They deposit him in his car, and position it to go over a ravine. The car flies off the cliff, erupting into flame. At midnight, Juana, Kitty and Chris snap out of their possession, with no knowledge of the crime they have committed. Chris returns home and wonders where Jim is, feeling guilty for some reason. Miraculously, Jim shows up, alive but confused, having escaped the burning car. Suddenly re-

possessed, Chris stabs her husband in the back, and completes the centuries-old pact.

COMMENTARY: Besides introducing the world to Tom Selleck, *Daughters of Satan* points the way to a new generation of reality/game show TV programming, if only the intrepid producer would look at it. As a woman is tortured by a satanic cult early in the film, her feet impaled on rows of spikes, her torturess suddenly demands of her: "Repeat the nine names of the principal powers of darkness!" It is kind of like *Jeopardy* meets *Survivor*, meets *The Weakest Link*, with a cult twist thrown in. A contestant could answer questions not for the opportunity to win prize money, but to avoid bloody punishment, thus granting a whole new meaning to the idea of a "lifeline." Some people already say Anne Robinson is evil, so this show would be a shoo in...

But all kidding aside, this tale of karmic revenge and past lives is no boost to anyone's resume, certainly not Selleck's. The poor guy spends much of the picture unaware of the danger his (possessed) wife represents to him. "Does the fly rest easily caught in the web?" Selleck's psychologist asks of him ... and the answer seems to be "yes," since Selleck's character never catches on to the ramifications of the situation.

A film of rudimentary style and acting, the low budget *Daughters of Satan* at least looks interesting, having been lensed in the Philippines. That bit of local color aside, the film relentlessly relies on horror clichés such as evil dogs, evil domestics (both better handled in *The Omen* [1976]) and paranormal phenomena such as possession and reincarnation. One might think when surrounded by so many evil characters and unusual circumstances, the average person would be pretty concerned, or at least a tad suspicious. Consider these facts: a 25-year-old wife suddenly (and spontaneously) reveals intimate knowledge of an obscure historical event (a witch burning). A dog miraculously disappears out of a painting and then shows up in the flesh at your house (wearing a collar that identifies his place of residence as being apartment # 666). A poison gas suddenly suffuses your bedroom. Thugs miraculously appear in your backyard and beat you up. After your wife fixes you a cocktail, you fall unconscious ... only to awaken in

your car as it is speeding off a cliff. *Hmmm*. Could something strange be happening?

One would think that one or two of these events might really send up some warning signals to the average husband. Naturally, Selleck, like a chicken with his head cut off, dodges back and forth gathering information, never quite understanding the full picture or the real breadth of his danger. Naturally, Selleck's last scene in the film depicts him returning to his wife's loving embrace ... as she prepares to plunge a knife into his back. Frankly, at that point it is difficult to empathize with a character so dumb.

The actors aren't aided much by *Daughters of Satan*'s hilarious dialogue either. When Christina is asked where she has been, by husband Jim (Selleck), she casually replies: "I was at a meeting." Strictly speaking, that report is true. What she fails to report is that the meeting was a gathering of the Manila Assembly of Lucifer, and that she was tortured there for hours on end. Still, at least she didn't lie!

In another funny moment, a hot-to-trot Satanist makes a pass at Selleck, noting that in "eleven years" her husband "never once touched" her breasts. Now *there's* a come-on! Perhaps the most ludicrous (under)statement comes from the future *Magnum P.I.* star himself as he notes of the devil canine (affectionately named Nicodemus), "that dog has been bugging the hell out of me!"

In a movie populated by idiots, the horror sequences of *Daughters of Satan* take on an unusual air, and a high degree of unintentional humor. In a picnic sequence, Christine sits behind Jim, comforting him and telling him he's not crazy, while at the same time she cravenly fingers a ceremonial dagger and plots to murder him. Amusingly, every time Jim turns to face his wife, she hides the knife behind her back. Oddly, this shtick seems to be timed for comedy rather than suspense. It is well rehearsed, and even well acted, but is utterly ridiculous. After all, if you were planning to murder your husband, does it matter in the slightest if he turns around to face you while you deliver the death blow? Instead of killing Jim, the diffident Christine can't seem to make up her mind, hiding the knife, then brandishing it in a comic ballet that just keeps going and going.

If all of this isn't bad enough, *Daughters of Satan* even fails to keep track of its own plot. Late in the film, Kitty recommends to Chris that she see psychiatrist Dr. Dangel. Oddly, Christine does not recognize the doctor's name ... even though the film establishes that Dangel has already been her therapist for some time! Apparently, a side effect of possession is stupidity ... or maybe that's just an affliction that everyone in *Daughters of Satan* suffers from...

LEGACY: Though *Daughters of Satan* might best be left forgotten, it did launch the career of Tom Selleck. Still, Selleck must have been chargrined in the summer 2000 to see the film resurrected on TNT, just as his TV movie *Running Mates* was receiving critical accolades.

Dear Dead Delilah (1972) * * 1/2

Cast & Crew

CAST: Agnes Moorehead (Delilah); Will Geer (Ray Jurroe); Michael Ansara (Morgan); Dennis Patrick (Alonzo); Anne Meacham (Grace); Robert Gentry (Richard); Elizabeth Eis (Ellen); Ruth Baker (Buffy); Anne Gibbs (Young Luddy); John Marriott (Marshall); Patricia Carmichael (Luddy).

CREW: Southern Star Productions and Jack Clement Present *Dear Dead Delilah*. *Art Director:* James Tilton. *Costume Designer:* Nancy Potts. *Music:* Bill Justis. *Director of Photography:* William R. Johnson. *Assistant Cameramen:* Wilson Hong, John Packwood. *Sound:* Robert Janus. *Gaffer:* Murray Cohan. *Unit Manager:* Michael Kenner. *Music Coordinator:* David Davis. *Music Editor:* Ken Johnson. *Sound Mixer:* Al Gramaglia. *Production Manager:* Fred Carmichael. *Assistant to Producer:* Tilla Marshall. *Script Continuity:* Phyllis Pestaino. *Make-up:* Vincent Loscalzo. *Hairdresser:* William Chiarelli. *Wardrobe:* Clifford Capone. *Stunt Coordinator:* Alex Stevens. *Casting Assistant:* John Murrey. *Technical Advisor:* K. Baker. *Editor:* Ron

Dorfman. *Associate Producer*: Susan Richardson.
Produced by: Jack Clement. *Written and directed by*:
John Farris. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 97
minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Tennessee in 1943, young Luddy brutally murders her mother with an axe after fighting about the G.I. boyfriend who impregnated her...

Twenty-five years later, an older, fatter and sadder Luddy is released from prison. She saw her baby only once, and has spent her adult life wondering what became of the child. Luddy soon finds employment at South Hall Plantation, the exclusive home of the rich Charles family. There, she cares for the wealthy but wheelchair-bound Delilah Charles, family matriarch and cold-hearted shrew. Delilah has been scheming, along with her lawyer, Ray, to find a way to cut her greedy siblings, Grace, Morgan and Alonzo, out of the family estate.

Luddy befriends Ellen, Delilah's pretty young niece, and her husband Richard, but finds a special kinship with Alonzo, a sad drug addict and family physician. Like Luddy, Alonzo loves children, and longs for the child he lost many years earlier during a botched abortion.

At a family dinner one night, Delilah reveals that she only has 30 days to live. She then announces to her siblings that she is leaving the South Hall estate to the state of Tennessee—not her family. However, Delilah also reveals that she has found her dead father's secret stash of cash worth \$600,000. She reports that the sibling who finds this "horse money" (cash earned from the sale of the family horses during the Great Depression) can keep it. Soon, the avaricious siblings are at each other's throats looking for the hidden cash.

One night, Luddy discovers a bloody axe on her pillow, and finds the family lawyer, Ray Jurroes, butchered nearby. She believes she committed the murder, and sets out to hide the attorney's death with the help of a sympathetic Alonzo.

Meanwhile, Morgan reveals to Delilah that he is in deep financial

trouble—\$40,000 worth—and that he needs the horse money to set things right. Delilah refuses to help, and so Morgan and his girlfriend begin searching for the horse money. They dig near a recently installed plumbing line after finding \$50 in cash nearby. That night, an unseen assailant murders Buffy, Morgan's girlfriend, and then Morgan, with a very sharp axe.

The next night, Delilah's sister, Grace, is decapitated by an assailant dressed up to resemble her dead father. The killer reveals himself to be Richard, Ellen's husband. He has found the horse money in the tomb of Mr. Charles, and, having learned about Luddy's past, is murdering his relatives with an axe in order to frame Luddy and take the money for himself! After finishing off Grace, Richard even murders his wife, Ellen! Then, he sees to it that Alonzo is given an apparently fatal drug overdose.

Finally it comes down to Luddy and Richard, but Richard has forgotten about the stubborn Delilah ... who disappeared into the tomb of her father and was believed to have expired there. She crawls out of the tomb, summoning all her failing strength, blasts Richard's head to smithereens with a shotgun, and finally passes away. This leaves Luddy and a recovered Alonzo to keep the horse money and start a home for orphaned children.

COMMENTARY: *Dear Dead Delilah* is a mildly intriguing story of family politics, dysfunction, and murder. Madness, greed, duplicity and even excessive gore are the primary players in the drama. A sturdy B-movie cast, including Michael Ansara and Agnes Moorehead, tether the film to reality and make some of the suspects seem more than just ciphers.

The film opens with some interesting drawings over the opening credits. These sketches of murder and violence (by Luddy), not only remind audiences of her murderous past with her mother, but forecast her future at South Hall Plantation. What's rewarding about the film is that it is a successful game of audience misdirection, beginning with these disturbing works of art. The film opens with Norman Bates-like story of Luddy's youth (and murderous infraction). She defies her mother, kills her, and goes to jail for it. The rest of the film is built on the assumption that she is going to go nuts again and resume her homicidal ways. However, that never

happens, and what results is a moderately effective “time bomb” effect.

Alfred Hitchcock always said it was interesting to put a time bomb under a table, and then *not* have it go off. That’s Luddy’s function in the plot. She is a logical suspect, and a convicted murderer ... but not the real villain in this case. Rather surprisingly, Luddy runs into a group of people who are far more nasty and brutal than she ever was. She’s small time compared to the decadent, rich and powerful Charles family.

Dear Dead Delilah is brutal not only in its violence, but in its depiction of the Southern social upper crust. This is clearly a family that has been pampered for far too long. Delilah is purposefully cruel, and her siblings are spoiled wretches for the most part. The primary concern of all these folks is money, whether it be who gives it or who receives it. Morgan blows his money on bad business schemes, and never learns from his excessive mistakes. Richard is a hungry young buck, willing to marry, beg, plead or kill to be wealthy. The family dynamic is so bad that sensitive Alonzo has become an addict, unable to cope with a Machiavellian home life. Luddy, a poor girl out of rural Tennessee, is the only character who does not care about money, and in a nice twist, she is the character who walks away with it at the end of the picture.

Where *Dear Dead Delilah* focuses much of its creative energy is in its depiction of gory violence. In the prologue, a severed arm is seen on the floor, and Luddy’s mom is garbed in a blood-spattered dress. Later, Ray staggers out of a stable, clutching a bloody hand. Richard receives a bullet to the face in a really bloody climax, and so on. It probably isn’t necessary to go to these violent lengths to make the film’s twin points (that insanity is not reserved for the poor, and that the rich exploit the poor). Still, the violence enlivens what might have been a rather pedestrian affair.

Dear Dead Delilah is not particularly good, or particularly bad. Some of the twists work just right, some don’t. The title, and the blood and guts, are the best part.

***Deliverance* (1972) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“...it works like a very smooth and exciting piece of toy machinery for men at Christmas.... It is the long-windedness and banality of some of the dialogue and action that startle you in the midst of the bashing plot and subtle look of the picture.... Strongly made, and a fine yarn as long as the story of the delivered ones isn't taken as metaphysically as the title suggests it should be.”—Penelope Gilliatt, *New Yorker*, August 5, 1972, pages 52-53.

“Between director Boorman and cameraman Vilmos Zsigmond exists an understanding that film is a visual experience. The imagery in this film is spectacular and the worthy result of delicate interplay of natural setting, sensitive composition, sophisticated work with the telephoto lenses, an eerie filter or solarization effects ... an engaging experience with considerable impact on a multiplicity of levels.”—Hal Aigner, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXVI, Number 2, Winter 1972–73, page 41.

“The film starts out with heavy emphasis on nature, on its hidden savagery, and the despoilment of nature by technology. The first thing we see is a lumpy editorial, intercuts of bulldozers and sylvan beauty. But the only real drama comes from the encounter with two bestial mountaineers, who would have been what they are if bulldozers had never been invented.... Beyond the unfulfilled theme, the moral parallelisms of the script are intolerable.... The glory-of-nature shots are trite, the drama is clumsy, and the editing clanks.”—Stanley Kauffmann, *The New Republic*, August 5, 1972, pages 24, 35.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jon Voight (Ed); Burt Reynolds (Lewis); Ned Beatty (Bobby); Ronny Cox (Drew); Bil McKinney (Mountain Man); Herbert "Cowboy" Coward (Toothless Man); James Dickey (Sheriff Bullard); Lewis Crone (First Deputy); Ken Keener (Second Deputy); Ed Ramey (Old Man); Johnny Popwell (Ambulance Driver); John Fowler (Doctor); Jathry Rickman (Nurse); With: Bill Redden, Seamon Glass, Randall Deal, Louis Coldren, Pete Ware, Macon McCalman, Hoyt Pollard, Belinda Beatty, Charlie Boorman.

CREW: Warner Brothers Presents a John Boorman film, *Deliverance*. *Director of Photography:* Vilmos Zsigmond. *Editor:* Tom Priestley. *Art Director:* Fred Harpman. *Property Master:* Syd Greenwood. *Script Supervisor:* Ray Quiroz. *Technical Advisors:* Charles Wiggin, E. Lewis King. *Production Supervisor:* Wallace Worsley. *Assistant Directors:* Al Jennings, Miles Middough. *Production Secretary:* Sue Dwiggins. *Special Effects:* Marcel Vecoutere. *Wardrobe Master:* Bucky Rous. *Make-up:* Michael Hancock. *Hairstylist:* Donoene McKay. *Sound Mixer:* Walter Goss. *Sound Editor:* Jim Atkinson. *Dubbing Mixer:* Doug Turner. *Assistant Editor:* Ian Rakoff. *Second Unit Photography:* Bill Butler. *Camera Operator:* Sven Wainum. *Assistant Camera:* Earl Clark. *Electrical Supervisor:* Jim Blair. *Casting:* Lynn Stalmaster. "Dueling Banjos" arranged and played by: Eric Weissberg with Steve Mandel. *Screenplay by:* James Dickey. *Based on the novel by:* James Dickey. *Produced and Directed by:* John Boorman. *M.P.A.A Rating:* R. *Running time:* 110 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A foursome of suburban weekend warriors (Ed, Lewis, Drew and Bobby) head to the country to navigate a river that will soon be destroyed by the creation of a dam and an artificial lake. While filling up their cars with gas at a remote country station, Drew, the liberal of the bunch, attempts to befriend a little boy with music, and the two musicians duel playfully with banjo and guitar.

Afterwards, Drew's attempts at friendship with the boy are rejected outright because he is a stranger in those parts. The macho survivalist, Lewis, then hires two locals to drive the cars to the bottom of the river, at the town of Aintry, while they canoe there. After a few near misses, Lewis finds the river and the foursome land their canoes into the water at last. Ed, an average family man, and Drew take one boat; Bobby, the sarcastic city slicker, and Lewis man the other. As they head down the river, the banjo-playing mountain boy looks after them with an expression of suspicion.

On the river, rapids come fast, and the weekenders navigate them with flying colors, exuberant in their defiance of nature. On the first night, they camp on the riverside, eating fish Lewis has caught. The next morning, Ed hunts a deer, but finds himself unable to kill it with his bow and arrow, his hands quaking at the moment of truth.

The four return to the river, this time with Bobby and Ed sharing a boat. For a time, Ed and Bobby are separated from the other team. They go ashore and are confronted by two armed locals. These burly mountain men demand that the trespassers go up into the woods with them. Ed and Bobby try to defuse the situation, but are left with no choice but to obey the armed men. Ed is consequently tied to a tree while one of the mountain men sexually assaults Bobby, forcing him to squeal like a pig during an act of anal penetration. Ed is in line for an even more horrible treatment, but Lewis arrives in time and kills the offending mountain man with an arrow. The other man, a toothless simpleton, escapes.

The four vacationers debate how to handle the corpse, and whether or not to notify authorities. Drew thinks the law should be involved in any decision they make, but Ed casts the deciding vote against such action, and the men bury the body. They continue downriver.

On the journey through deep rapids, a despondent Drew fails to wear his life jacket, and is consequently ejected from the boat—lost. The others, fearing he has been shot, search for him, and their boats collide and are overturned. Lewis, Bobby and Ed are cast overboard, one canoe destroyed, and thrown into the harsh water. Though the three survive the accident, Lewis's leg is badly broken. He also reports that Drew was definitely shot ... which means that the surviving mountain man has returned for vengeance. Worse, he is

waiting on top of the nearest mountain, the area directly above the three men's position!

By dark of night, Ed scales the peaks of the mountain to confront the killer who waits above. He makes it to the top, exhausted, and waits for the redneck assassin to make a move. His hands shaking at the moment of kill, Ed manages to control his fear, and kill his enemy.

Ed, now the acknowledged leader of the group, the wounded Lewis, and Bobby continue downriver. Along the way, they discover Drew's body, and realize that it too must be done away with so as to hide the evidence of armed conflict with locals. They sink the body after an abrupt, halting eulogy, and take one last turn at the rapids. They survive, and make it to the town of Ainty, where they are greeted with suspicion by the authorities.

As the three men heal from their wounds, police probe more deeply into their story ... and recover a shattered canoe at a different point on the river than where Ed and the others claimed it was lost. In the final analysis, the police have nothing to hold the men on, and they are allowed to leave town.

Returning home to his wife and children, Ed is haunted by nightmares, and of a dead hand rising from a still lake...

COMMENTARY: *Deliverance* is one of the most powerful, profound, and harrowing horror films of the 1970s. It scared a whole generation away from camping in the woods, and remains one of the most stirring and exciting film testaments of man's violent nature. The secret to its success is found somewhere in its unique combination of thematic depth and exhilarating action. It is a film that doesn't pause long on big issues, but which nonetheless raises all kinds of questions about mankind.

Based on James Dickey's novel, *Deliverance* is a film that seems deceptively simple at first blush. Four weekend warriors meet with local hostility on a wild river, and must confront not only nature and their fellow man, but their own instincts and morals. From that elegant template is forged a brilliant action story that can be interpreted on a number of thematic levels.

First and foremost, the film tracks clearly as a metaphor for American involvement in the Vietnam War. Like that conflict (which was raging when the film was produced), *Deliverance* reveals an American intrusion into a more “primitive” world where the local culture is misunderstood, and treated with disrespect. What is plain almost from the beginning of the film is Lewis’s and Bobby’s disdain for the locals, and their existence on the fringes of the wild. “We’ve got a live one here,” Bobby sarcastically states within earshot of one local. “I love the way you wear that hat,” he mocks another.

It’s almost as if the locals are not fully human beings, and therefore somehow incapable of understanding sarcasm. These folks don’t talk a different language, as it were, though Bobby and Lewis treat them that way ... like foreigners. In point of fact, that is much the same way that many American soldiers treated the people who spoke their own native tongue in Vietnam. They were treated as primitives in their own homes, not as simply different but equal.

Furthermore, Lewis (Burt Reynolds) is a symbol of American arrogance and potency, especially in relation to the Vietnam conflict. Though he is a stranger to the river, he believes he knows the land better than those who inhabit it. He is certain he knows exactly where the river is, and takes special pains to lead the way to it, ignoring and bullying the locals who are more familiar with the terrain. Reynolds is perfect for this role because, like Charlton Heston, he typifies American strength—he is both macho and physically beautiful. Like America in Vietnam, Reynolds’ character believes he is tough stuff, invincible even, yet he is completely out of his element when faced with the truth of just how tough the terrain truly is. It is no accident that Reynolds is rendered impotent halfway through the film, disabled by a crippling wound. His strength is useless in this land, much as America’s strength, technological and military, proved useless in Vietnam.

On a more personal level, *Deliverance* also concerns man, and what kind of creature he is. “The savage within” rears its head, and the film suggests that brutality and violence are forces that can be summoned within every human, that violence may be repressed in a civilized society, but if forced into service, it will arise. “Sometimes

you have to lose yourself before you can find anything,” Lewis states meaningfully, early in the film, and that might well be *Deliverance*’s mantra. There is a distinct macho side to the film that suggests you never really know yourself until you confront the worst.

In that regard, *Deliverance* is about four people who have lost touch not only with nature, but the human imperative to survive. On a day-to-day basis in the city nothing challenges these weekend warriors. So what do they do? They choose a form of recreation that requires them to put themselves in danger. It’s as if to feel like men in today’s unchallenging world, they must face mortal threats. It says something pertinent about our society that we must artificially generate such challenges for ourselves. We have advanced to the point where the circle of life, the battle for life and death, is distant, yet somehow we crave it.

Tellingly, it is not distant on the river. The instincts to fight, to struggle, to kill, are re-awakened in the visitors. Ed is unable to kill a deer because, intellectually, he knows it is not necessary. Yet, when his life is in danger, he is capable of killing a man. The battle for survival makes monsters of us all, doesn’t it? Clearly, the transition from “civilized man” to survival-oriented organism is not an easy one. Even after Bobby’s brutal rape, the group of four wastes valuable time debating the morality of their situation. They are blissfully unaware that they are still on enemy soil, in mortal jeopardy. They are literally babes in the woods, unable to grasp where they really are, and the gravity of their situation.

Each character in *Deliverance* represents some facet of the modern man. Drew is the liberal, the intellectual. He acts as the group’s conscience. He still sees the world in moral absolutes. “It’s a matter for the law,” he declares of the mountain man’s murder. Yet there is no law out there ... or perhaps only the law of the jungle. It is no wonder that Drew is killed first. The voice of society, the voice of morality, has little effect in the Darwinian world of the forest, in the kill-or-be-killed world of the rapids. He is unable to adapt to a world without the artificial structures he has imposed, and so dies first.

Lewis represents American arrogance and authority. Yet the jungle

doesn't allow for vanity, or arrogance either. You can't beat nature, and the over-confident Lewis is taken out of the action early too, wounded so badly he can't even sit up. He thought he was more powerful than his surroundings, but he wasn't.

Bobby is a symbol of American flab and laziness. He depends on everybody else to help him survive the weekend. He is "rescued" first by Lewis, then by Ed. He is a flabby, weak representative of a modern urban man. He survives by luck, but not before being humiliated.

Ed, the film's protagonist, symbolizes the everyman. When he scales the mountain and kills the second redneck, it is a rite of passage, and Ed replaces Lewis as the expedition leader. This could be interpreted as recognition of the fact that nature does not appreciate extremes. Drew, the liberal, is too weak to survive. Lewis fails because there is no room for arrogance in the wild. Ed survives because he is temperate, and because, of all the characters, he seems genuinely to be fighting for something beyond survival. Of all the characters, he is the only one who is constantly defined in terms of family life. At the end of the picture, the audience sees his wife, briefly. He kills to protect himself, but also to return to the nurturing environment of hearth. Like the American soldier in Vietnam who keeps a photograph of his wife in his uniform, Ed keeps his eye on the prize, and balances his behavior to assure he can attain it.

This sounds like a lot to digest in a two-hour motion picture, but *Deliverance* moves like a rollercoaster, confidently sailing from scene to scene. The principal actors look to have performed all their stunts on the river, and the authenticity of those action sequences is amazing. The river scenes appear legitimately dangerous, and that's another area where Boorman's approach excels: he captures nature as inherently dangerous, and doesn't shy away from showing it as both beautiful and menacing.

Besides pace and distinctive action, *Deliverance* remains memorable. The legendary dueling banjos sequence nicely reveals how disparate cultures can come together for music. Music is the universal language, and for a moment, when the banjo and guitar join, the film is euphoric. Peace can be made, and it doesn't have to be

forged through violence.

And, no review of *Deliverance* would be complete without mentioning the scene that has had men squirming for almost thirty years. That central rape scene is incredibly powerful, and disturbing. The rape represents man's worst fear, a harrowing, terrible sequence that exposes, once and for all, that rape is about power, not sex. The rape scene actually mirrors much of the action on the rapids: both scenes focus on power, and who will command power, whether it be locals, or nature itself. The scene is also about humiliation, and bringing the city-folk down to size. Bobby, who was so sarcastic and arrogant to the local men, learns the hard way that he's not in charge in that part of the woods.

There is another rape in the movie too—the rape of the river by man for his own purposes. Bulldozers encroach on trees. Dams force back the river's edge, and nature's path is circumvented for development. By springing to life one last time to attack the city four, the river is issuing its death rattle. Before it falls to man once and for all, it strikes a blow at its enemy. "Don't take me for granted. You'll regret it."

In whatever way one chooses to view *Deliverance*, it is a powerful adventure yarn, filled with danger, suspense, and action. And for those who say it isn't a horror movie, take one more look at a certain scene in the woods, and how it is constructed to convey not only inevitability, but impotency, and terror.

***Demons of the Mind* (1972) * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Paul Jones (Carl); Patrick Magee (Dr. Falkenberg); Gillian Hills (Elizabeth Zorn); Robert Hardy (Baron Zorn); Michael Hordern (Priest); Yvonne Mitchell (Hilda); Kenneth J. Warren (Klaus); Virginia Wetherell (Inga); Barry Stanton (Ernst); Robert Brown (Felschinger); Deidre Costello (Magda); Shane Briant (Emil Zorn); Sidonie Bond (Zorn's Wife); Thomas Heathcote

(Coachman); John Atkinson (First Villager); George Cormack (Second Villager); Mary Hignett (Matronly Woman); Jan Adair (First Girl); Jane Garew (Second Girl).

CREW: A Hammer Production, in association with Frank Godwin Productions, Ltd. *Director of Photography:* Arthur Grant. *Designer:* Michael Stringer. *Production Supervisor:* Roy Skeggs. *Editor:* Chris Barnes. *Music Composed by:* Harry Robinson. *Musical Supervisor:* Philip Martell. *Production Manager:* Christopher Neame. *Assistant Supervisor:* Ted Morley. *Continuity:* Gladys Goldsmith. *Casting Director:* James Liggit. *Camera Operator:* Neil Binney. *Sound Recordist:* John Purchas. *Dubbing Mixer:* Len Abbott. *Sound Editor:* Terry Poulton. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Rosemary Burrows. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Eileen Sullivan. *Make-up:* Trevor Grole-Rees. *Hair Dresser:* Maud Onslow. *Screenplay:* Christopher Wicking. *From an original story by:* Christopher Wicking and Frank Godwin. *Produced by:* Frank Godwin. *Directed by:* Peter Sykes.

SYNOPSIS: In rural England of the late 1800s, a disturbed but beautiful girl, Elizabeth Zorn, is lost in the woods near Zorn Manor and befriended by a handsome stranger, Klaus. Later, she is returned to the estate of her wealthy family. Her brother Emil is imprisoned there by the tyrannical patriarch of the clan, Baron Zorn.

Meanwhile, a woman in the nearby village is attacked and murdered in the woods by a dangerous, hidden assailant. Subsequently, a Christian priest arrives in the village, claiming that God has much work for him to do there.

Inside Zorn Manor, Elizabeth is subjected to a cruel bloodletting procedure at the hands of her father and aunt. Emil objects to the barbaric procedure, but his father forcibly keeps Emil and Elizabeth apart in accord with some bizarre secret plan.

Amidst all this strangeness, a psychologist banished from polite

society, Dr. Falkenberg, is retained by the Zorn family to see to the strange siblings. When he arrives at Zorn's house, there has been another murder in the local village, and Dr. Falkenberg immediately detects that Baron Zorn is psychologically responsible for all the insanity and violence. When hypnotized by Falkenberg, Zorn reveals that he feels a terrible bloodlust. He is impotent, and fears that his insanity has passed into the blood of his children. His obsession with such depraved thoughts led his late wife to madness and suicide.

A weakened Elizabeth and an anemic Emil attempt to escape the clutches of their father, but are intercepted before they can leave the house. Falkenberg attempts to cure them, and proposes a strange treatment for their ailment, which, it turns out, is an incestuous sexual desire for each other. To cure them, Emil enlists the services of a town wench to "play" as Elizabeth. But instead of making love to her, Emil kills the wench.

Falkenberg then realizes that the baron has been orchestrating and encouraging this homicidal behavior in his son. He has been using Emil as the living embodiment, the instrument, of his own lust. He's been letting Emil out of the house to rape and kill local women.

The villagers soon witness the baron dumping the wench's body into the river, and are enraged. Emil kills his aunt, and attempts to escape with Elizabeth, but Elizabeth's young lover, Klaus, tries to intervene. Emil knocks him out, and flees into the woods with his sister. The baron kills Dr. Falkenberg, and realizes he must wipe out his entire bloodline so the madness will stop. He takes off after his children, but the villagers form a mob and chase the baron. Though Zorn shoots and kills Emil, the mob, led by the priest, in turn, kills the baron. They chop off one of his hands, and impale him on a giant cross. Elizabeth and her lover are reunited, but she is still beset by madness.

COMMENTARY: Hammer delves deep into psychological horror in the gritty, disturbing *Demons of the Mind*. This film concerns itself with incest, madness, and hysteria with an admirable seriousness, and even a flair for the artistic. It is an unhappy, unpleasant film, but one that has the courage to see its convictions through to the bitter end.

Demons of the Mind opens with several sepia-tone photographs displaying homes and people from the late 1800s. It's a decidedly romantic view of the past, and it is instantly cast aside as the film then goes to some lengths to suggest a life of unfettered "chaos." In particular, the focus is on the dysfunctional Zorn family. Brother and sister Zorn share incestuous feelings for one another, Daddy Zorn is an impotent rage-aholic, and Mommy Zorn committed suicide rather than deal with a family life of major dysfunction. Into this mix of mental illness comes a controversial early psychologist (based on Mesmer), who wants to find order in the chaos, and thereby cure the Zorn family. But, as he discovers too late, some diseases just cannot be cured.

Director Peter Sykes does not flinch from making the material gritty and unpleasant. So many Hammer films (specifically of the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* variety) are romantic views of the past—essentially lush period pieces. The model here (as in *Hands of the Ripper* [1971]) is one of unromantic, ugly reality. In one thoroughly nauseating (though riveting) scene, Sykes takes viewers step by step through the arcane process of bloodletting. The torturous procedure is shown in nauseating, graphic detail. A small device embedded with razors is inserted in the supple flesh of Elizabeth's hip (where there are already scars from previous applications...). Then a heated cup is attached to the razor wounds, creating a kind of suction. Before long, thick red blood is draining by torrents into the cup ... and it looks very, very real. If there is a more disturbing image in the films of Hammer Studios, this author hasn't seen it.

The remainder of the film is an intimate, head-on look at madness. "The place reeks of madness and decay," one character aptly states of the Zorn homestead, and Sykes' camera accommodates that perspective by filming many of the scenes from an askew, cockeyed angle. Not so much as to be exaggerated or cartoony though, just enough to make the point that things are off-kilter.

Sykes also cleverly equates sex with death in at least one important sequence. When Emil kills his aunt, he jams a set of keys into her throat in a thrusting, violent motion that reeks of phallic symbolism. Another phallic image occurs when Elizabeth makes contact with Emil through a keyhole. She pushes a rose and its long

stem through the hole, and on the other side of the door, Emil rapturously smells the intruding shaft. It's decidedly kinky, but done in an artistic manner that gets the point across. Sex is the issue between these two disturbed characters, so the imagery is contextually appropriate.

Demons of the Mind isn't really a scary movie. It's just a blunt, disturbing one. It reveals a Hammer that has grown up a bit, and is willing to look at stories of an unromantic, gritty nature. Maybe *Straw Dogs* or its ilk had made an impression with the studio. Whatever the cause of this experiment, that "new freedom" in cinema is evidenced here. And, in a particularly gory sequence, the baron has his hand severed in full view of the camera. Bloody good.

While several moments in *Demons of the Mind* are quite strong and well played-out, it seems necessary to note that there are also some rather jarring jumps from scene to scene, as if the idea of transition was too much for the editor to grasp. Still, if one is interested in the old taboo of incest and the archetypal idea of a father killing his own children (a theme that has all kinds of psychological possibilities...) then *Demons of the Mind* is a pretty involving picture. And a gross one, too.

***Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972) * * ***

Critical Reception

"Crowded with mad villainy, stuffed with hair-raising perils and escape, it's a serial fan's dream of the ultimate cliffhanger. In the best serial traditions, its action is maxi and its plausibility mini.... *Phibes* also makes gentle fun of movie styles of the 1930s, and with its Art Deco sets and costumes is a treat for your ... eyes."—Margaret Ronan, *Senior Scholastic*, March 5, 1977, page 18.

"The second *Phibes* epic shows few signs of the ingenious touches and little of the wit of the first."—Alvin H. Marill, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIV, Number 3, March 1973, page 182.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Vincent Price (Dr. Anton Phibes); Robert Quarry (Darius Biederbeck); Peter Jeffrey (Trout); Fiona Lewis (Diana); Hugh Griffith (Ambrose); John Cater (Waverly); Gerald Sim (Hackett); Lewis Flander (Baker); John Thaw (Shavers); Peter Cushing (Captain); Beryl Reid (Miss Ambrose); Terry-Thomas (Lombardo); Valli Kemp (Vulnavia); Keith Bickley (Stewart); Milton Reid (Manservant).

CREW: James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff Present *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*. *Production Manager:* Richard Dalton. *Assistant Director:* Jack Wright. *Continuity:* Jane Buck. *Casting Director:* Sally Nicholl. *Director of Photography:* Alex Thomson. *Camera Operator:* Colin Corby. *Camera Assistant:* John Golding. *Make-up:* Carol Trevor-Rees. *Hairdresser:* Bernadette Ibbetson. *Supervising Electrician:* Roy Bond. *Sets Designed by:* Brian Eatwell. *Assistant Art Director:* Peter Withers. *Costume Supervisor:* Ivy Baker Jones. *Construction Manager:* Harry Phipps. *Properties:* Rex Hobbs. *Editor:* Tristram Cones. *Sound Recordists:* Les Hammond, Dennis Whitlock. *Sound Assistant:* Fred Tomlin. *Dubbing Editor:* Peter Lennard. *Original Music:* John Gale. *Written by:* Robert Fuest, Robert Blees. *Based on Characters Created by:* James Whiton, William Goldstein. *Executive Producers:* Samuel Z. Arkoff, James H. Nicholson. *Produced by:* Louis M. Heyward. *Directed by:* Robert Fuest. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Three years after he disappeared in his tomb, the evil Dr. Phibes awakens and walks upon the Earth once more. The moon is in the astral position it held 2000 years earlier, when a portal in Egypt was last open, and Phibes believes the doorway leads to the river of life ... a place that can bring his beloved wife, Victoria, back to life. Phibes teams up once more with his beautiful assistant Vulnavia, to look for the River of Life in the land of the pharaohs.

The plan hits a snag, however, when Phibes realizes his mansion has been destroyed, and his safe (with the secret map to the River of Life!) stolen.

The map is now in the hands of Phibes' archrival, the pompous Professor Biederbeck. Biederbeck also desires to learn the secrets of the River of Life, and his quest is personal: he is extremely long-lived thanks to a special elixir, but now he has run out of the life-giving fluid, and needs another tonic to maintain his unnatural life.

With his usual murderous zeal, Phibes sends an army of snakes into Biederbeck's house to murder his bodyguard and steal back the papyrus map. Once the map is safe, Phibes sets sail for Egypt while befuddled police investigate the theft.

Not surprisingly, Biederbeck is also aboard the ship bound for Egypt. One of his colleagues finds Victoria's corpse in the ship's hold, and Phibes traps him in a giant gin bottle (part of a publicity display) and throws the meddler overboard.

Phibes arrives in Egypt, and proceeds to the tomb he prepared years ago just for this occasion. Meanwhile, in Scotland Yard, the police realize they are once more dealing with Phibes and also head to Egypt ... well out of their jurisdiction. As the authorities look for Phibes, he murders an interloper in the tomb, using a hawk to peck the man to death. Undeterred, Phibes finds a secret room deep in the caverns, and inside is a sarcophagus and key—the route and means to gain access to the River of Life and restore Victoria. Meanwhile, Vulnavia seduces one of Biederbeck's men to his death with the help of scorpions, no less.

Biederbeck soon finds the tomb, and steals the key, the sarcophagus, and Victoria's body, causing Phibes to swear vengeance. The police warn Biederbeck about the mad doctor, but he is determined to be the first to gain access to the River of Life. By night, Phibes employs a giant fan to attack the Biederbeck camp, and then he crunches a guard in a giant vise. He steals back Victoria and the sarcophagus, but learns that Biederbeck has the key on his person. Phibes thus captures Diana, Biederbeck's lover, and agrees to an exchange: Diana's life for the key.

Biederbeck is unable to rescue Diana, who has been trapped in a rapidly flooding pyramid! As Diana faces submersion, Biederbeck gives up the key rather than see her die. Phibes spares Diana, and with key in hand, vaults down the River of Life with his beloved Victoria. Without the magic elixir, Biederbeck ages rapidly and dies...

COMMENTARY: No better or worse than its predecessor, *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* is every bit as fun. Nothing more than a collection of bloody set pieces strung together between witty asides, the film is macabre, ghoulish, silly, and at times downright disgusting. It is performed with real relish, and is a tasty dessert for the fun-minded horror fan.

The tone of this sequel is set at the very outset when a narrator, like one out of an old-time chapter play, enables viewers to catch up on events so far. It's a perfect opening touch, because this film is very much in the tradition of those old 1930s cliffhangers, with hissable villains, bizarre action scenes, and art deco sets galore. The fun in the picture results from seeing two horror icons of the era (Vincent Price and Robert Quarry) squaring off, trying to outdo the other in the quest to find the River of Life. As for Price, he's again in fine form. Together, Phibes and Vulnavia form the Pat Sajak and Vanna White of the horror set, forever dwelling in a perpetual game show of terror. Quarry is an especially good villain, pompous and arrogant, though less feral than Count Yorga. He has the stature and charisma to equal Price's, and he's a better foil for Phibes than Cotten was in the first film.

The best reason to see this film is to watch these two fine actors crack wise over half a dozen gory set pieces. A hawk pecks an intruder to death; a man is crushed in a vise; scorpions are released from a ceramic statue to teem all over an innocent man, biting him to death, and so forth. It's all pretty gross, but pretty fun. After one really disgusting murder, one character states of the victim, "I don't know about his body, but we should give his head a decent burial..." For tongue-in-cheek absurdity, one can do no better than this silly film, again an obvious forerunner to the tongue-in-cheek *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels of the 1980s.

Dracula AD 1972 (1972) * * *

Critical Reception

“...abysmal fang-and-cross flick without even the saving grace of humour. The worst of the Hammer Draculas, its would-be hip dialogue has to be heard to be believed.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 87.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Count Dracula); Peter Cushing (Professor Van Helsing); Stephanie Beacham (Jessica Van Helsing); Christopher Neame (Johnny Alucard); Michael Coles (Inspector); William Ellis (Joe Mitcham); Janet Key (Anna); Michael Kitchen (Greg); Caroline Munro (Laura); Marsha Hunt (Gaynor); Phillip Miller (Bob); David Andrews (Detective Sergeant); Lolly Bowers (Matron); Constance Luttrell (Mrs. Donnelly); Michael Daly (Charles); Artro Morris (Police Sgt); Jo Richardson (Crying Matron); Penny Brohms (Hippy Girl); Brian John Smith (Hippy Boy); Rock Group (Stoneground).

CREW: Warner Brothers Communication Company Presents a Hammer Production, *Dracula AD 1972*. *Director of Photography:* Dick Bush. *Processed by:* Humphries Laboratory. *Production Supervisor:* Roy Skeggs. *Designer:* Don Mingaye. *Editor:* James Needs. *Production Manager:* Ron Jackson. *Assistant Director:* Robert Lynn. *Continuity:* Dorean Dearnley. *Casting Director:* James Ligget. *Camera Operator:* Bernie Ford. *Special Effects:* Les Bowie. *Make-up:* Jill Carpenter. *Hairdresser:* Barbara Ritchie. *Assistant Art Director:* Ron Benton. *Sound Editor:* Roy Baker. *Recordist:* Claude Hitchcock. *Dubbing Mixer:* Bill Rowe. *Music Composed by:* Michael Vickers. *Musical*

Supervision: Philip Martell. *And Introducing:* Stoneground. *Songs:* "Alligator Man," and "You Better Come Through." *Screenplay:* Don Houghton. *Produced by:* Josephine Douglas. *Directed by:* Alan Gibson. A Hammer Production Made at Elstree Studios, Hertfordshire, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In 1872, Lawrence Van Helsing defeats the Prince of Darkness known as Dracula. After the vampire is staked in daylight, he dissolves ... but a stranger steals his ring and collects his ashes. Van Helsing dies from wounds suffered during the battle.

In 1972, a gang of groovy youngsters crash a stodgy estate party and dance to the tunes of Stoneground, a new rock sensation. One of the rebellious youngsters, Johnny Alucard, suggests a different kind of high after the police end the party: a date with the devil. Led by Johnny, the group decides to conduct a black mass in a de-sanctified church due for demolition.

Among the teens is Jessica Van Helsing, whose grandfather is an expert in all matters of demonology and the occult. He is concerned that Jess is hanging with the wrong crowd, but she assures him of her virtue. That night, Jess, her boyfriend Bob and the others convene over the grave of Lawrence Van Helsing in the cemetery. They perform the black magic ritual and Johnny even uses the blood of one of the group, Laura, to resurrect Dracula. The Prince of Darkness is reborn to claim his first victim, Laura, and the rest of the gang runs in terror.

The next day, Alucard tries to convince his freaked-out friends that the group witnessed a hoax, but Jessica is not convinced. And then Laura's body turns up at a construction site! The police seek the help of Van Helsing, remembering his assistance on a case of witchcraft not long before. Van Helsing suspects the presence of a vampire, and soon Jessica reveals everything, including the specifics of the black mass. Van Helsing then realizes that Alucard is an anagram for Dracula, and that he must face not just any vampire but the king.

At the same time, Dracula claims another victim, though he desires

to take Jessica Van Helsing and destroy the Van Helsing family line. Alucard wants immortality from Dracula and promises him Jessica's life in return for it. The deal is sealed and Jessica is delivered to the vampire, even as Alucard becomes a murderous vampire.

Van Helsing attempts to rescue his daughter. He fights Alucard at his apartment and uses the running water of a shower stall, in conjunction with daylight, to kill the vampire. He discovers Dracula's plan to marry Jessica—the ultimate ruin of the Van Helsing, and makes for the church. He makes preparations to destroy Dracula as night falls. At last, Dracula and his nemesis meet for a final struggle. The battle is won by Van Helsing when he douses Dracula with holy water and sees the vampire impaled on a bed of spikes in sanctified ground.

COMMENTARY: Though not well-liked by Hammer aficionados (primarily because it takes the good Count Dracula out of his time period and into ours), *Dracula AD 1972* is nonetheless a solid and substantial addition to Hammer Studios' seemingly immortal Dracula franchise. For a change, new ideas are in evidence, and the film actually has a thesis concerning contrasting time periods: holy past versus unholy present. The film handles this comparison of disparate eras in a unique visual way, and actually generates some interesting debate about sex, religion, and even the generation gap.

Dracula AD 1972 opens in the past, 1872 to be precise, before it voyages forward a century to 1972 and director Alan Gibson immediately states his argument about contrasts. In 1872, leaves blow freely on an earthen firmament, and the camera is positioned behind several trees. There is an idyllic country road in evidence too.

In 1972, the landscape has morphed dramatically, and Gibson's camera captures the hustle and bustle of a construction site and a busy freeway. Racing automobiles have replaced the horse-drawn carriage, and the audience has traveled from a time of natural beauty to one of man's technological ascent. The viewer has gone from a time of superstition and belief (as demonstrated by the presence of Dracula) to one of reason, rationality and science.

The images of these disparate eras are joined together by a brilliant

transitional conceit. The camera tilts up from Van Helsing's gravestone (circa 1872), and *boom!*—a jumbo jet flies overhead, and the soundtrack turns to rock-'n'-roll as the picture greets the latter half of the 20th century. Like Kubrick's famous bone-into-spaceship transition (encompassing centuries of evolution) in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), this little tilt from grounded past to technological future overhead is an economical, artful juxtaposition that visually captures how much has changed in the intervening century.



Count Dracula (Christopher Lee) gets the point in the finale of *Dracula AD 1972* (1972).

Perhaps more significant than the physical/technological changes from 1872 to 1972, Gibson (and Houghton's screenplay) chart the

moral changes. Dracula came out of the Victorian era, an epoch of moral rectitude and a concentrated repression of desire. Dracula emerges in an age of moral, political and sexual revolution and relativism. The freedom of this new age extends beyond sexual freedom into deviant religious freedom, to Satan worshipping even. No doubt this is a comment on how easy it is to be decadent in a society of perceived social freedom.

The physical changes in the film's central church reflect the moral decline of the intervening century. The church is beautiful, vibrant, alive in 1872, but out of use, dilapidated, and abandoned in freewheeling, freethinking 1972. Apparently, the creators of *Dracula AD 1972* see the new world as a venue in which evil can more easily flourish because the boundaries between good and evil have been blurred by a "do whatever feels right for you" mentality. This argument, cogently expressed in dialogue, production design, and even editing, grants this Dracula update a kind of relevance and importance missing from *Scars of Dracula*.

In some ways, the plot of *Dracula AD 1972* is one of teenage rebellion against authority figures too—another relevant topic since the phrase "the generation gap" was being bandied about so much, and youngsters were actively encouraging one another not to trust "anyone over thirty." Specifically, Van Helsing's lovely granddaughter, Jessica, informs her stodgy grandpa that she hasn't "dropped acid," "doesn't shoot up," and is not "sleeping with anyone ... yet." What she fails to mention, however, is that she has experimented with the black arts. She has dabbled in the occult, importantly the one and only real taboo area in her particular family. In other words Van Helsing might not really care if Jessica went to bed with a boyfriend, but he would *certainly* object to her practicing Satanism, considering his field of study and family lineage. Is it not always that way with adolescent rebellion? Does not the teenager always know precisely how to strike at the core of the parent's bedrock values?

Likewise, Dracula in this picture is a rather obvious surrogate for Charles Manson, an "evil" cult figure from that period. In the new age of freedom, youngsters could be drawn to evil via charismatic leaders ... and there is no more charismatic an evil than that

represented by vampires in general, and Count Dracula specifically. The generation gap, Dracula as cult guru, today's society as decadent anti-Victorian—these modern touches permit *Dracula AD 1972* the luxury of a new interpretation of an old myth. The details of vampirism, Dracula, and even Van Helsing are all highly familiar elements by now, but a “mod” setting of 1972 makes this film feel fresher, looser, and more fun than recent entries in the franchise. The underlying message, that sometimes old values still need to be adhered to in an era of too much moral relativism, feels fresh too. Even Dracula gets a new bag here: revenge!

The only disappointment in *Dracula AD 1972* stems from the handling of the Dracula character in the present. Though top billed, Christopher Lee appears infrequently on camera (in only about four or five scenes), and is not even permitted to leave the church where this Prince of Darkness is re-born. Producers may have rightly feared that a man in a black cape would seem less than imposing in hip '70s London, but an opportunity was missed. Imagine, for a moment, a resurgent Dracula suddenly awakened in a world where all appetites are valid, and where all appetites can be sated without moral judgment or condemnation. With that picture in mind, one can detect immediately how this film might have been genuinely great rather than merely good.

LEGACY: Liked or disliked, *Dracula AD 1972* proved to have an enduring central concept. The idea that Dracula might awaken in the present was resurrected in *Wes Craven Presents Dracula 2000* (2000), another re-invention of Bram Stoker's classic character.

Frenzy (1972) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...Hitchcock's return to the realm he commanded so long: the fears and excitement felt when viewing and hearing the stories of a diabolical narrator.... Shaffer should work with Hitchcock again.”—
Albert Johns, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXVI, Number 1, Fall 1972, pages 58–60.

“...a return to old forms by the master of suspense, whose newer forms have pleased movie critics but not his public. This is the kind of thriller Hitchcock was making in the 1940s filled with macabre details, incongruous humor, and the desperation of a man convicted of a crime he didn’t commit.”—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert’s Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 236.

“A fundamentally simple story spiced with dramatic invention, crackling suspense, and liberal doses of sardonic humor serving as counterpoint to horror are all present in *Frenzy*. And Hitchcock has stirred the brew with his old skill, imagination and contrivance.”—Hubbell Robinson, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIII, Number 7, August-September 1972, pages 429–430.

“...a psychological thriller that ranks among his [Hitchcock’s] very best and shows the 72-year-old director in triumphant command of his unmatched artistic powers.... Hitchcock uses the vehicle of the thriller as a conveyance for more serious social and psychological material. And, once again, he manipulates us like marionettes.”—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: “Return of the Master,” June 26, 1972, pages 83–84.

Cast and Crew

CAST: John Finch (Richard Blaney); Alec McCowen (Inspector Oxford); Barry Foster (Robert Rusk); Billie Whitelaw (Mrs. Porter); Barbara Leigh-Hunt (Brenda Blaney); Vivien Merchant (Mrs. Oxford); Anna Massey (Babs Milligan); Bernard Cribbins (Felix Forsythe); Michael Bates (Sergeant Spearman); Jean Marsh (Monica); Clive Swift (Johnny Porter); Madge Ryan, Elsie Randolph, Gerald Sim, John Bower, George Tovey, Jimmy

Gardner, Noel Johnson.

CREW: Universal Presents Alfred Hitchcock's *Frenzy*. *Camera Operator:* Paul Wilson. *Coordinator:* Angela Martelli. *Sound Mixer:* Peter Handford. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Dulcie Midwinter. *Casting:* Sally Nicholl. *Special Photographic Effects:* Albert Whitlock. *Make-up:* Harry Frampton. *Hairdresser:* Fay McDermott. *Set Dresser:* Simon Wakefield. *Production Designer:* Syd Cain. *Art Director:* Bob Laing. *Production Manager:* Brian Burgess. *Assistant Director:* Colin M. Brewer. *Film Editor:* John Jympson. *Director of Photography:* Gil Taylor. *Associate Producer:* William Hill. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Ron Goodwin. *Screenplay:* Anthony Shaffer. *Directed by:* Alfred Hitchcock. Made at Pinewood Studios, London, England, and on location in England. A Universal Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 116 minutes.

P.O.V.

"Where cinema is concerned, I am a puritan. I believe in telling a story visually. I believe in using the medium for what it is, the medium of montage, of cutting. A lot of films are only photographs of people talking, merely extensions of the theater. To me, the visual is first and the oral is supplementary... It's tremendously satisfying to be able to use cinema to achieve a mass emotion...."¹¹.—Director Alfred Hitchcock as he prepared *Frenzy* (1972), an adaptation of *Goodbye Picadilly, Farewell Leicester Square* by Arthur Labern.

SYNOPSIS: As a politician stands on the bank of the Thames to proclaim to a gathering crowd that the river has finally been cleaned of refuse and debris, the corpse of a strangled woman washes up nearby to interrupt the event. This unfortunate lady is the most recent victim of a serial killer terrorizing London: the Neck Tie Murderer!

Elsewhere in London, Dick Blaney, bartender at a pub called the Globe, is fired after his boss accuses him of stealing liquor from the stock. Dick leaves in a huff, says goodbye to his girlfriend Babs, and heads over to the fruit market to meet with his friend Bob Rusk. Bob recommends that Dick bet on a horse to make some extra cash, but Dick does not have the money for such a bet. Consequently, he is quite angry when Bob's horse pays off big. In a rotten mood all around, Dick drops by at a "lonely hearts" dating service run by his ex-wife, Brenda. She is sympathetic to his woes and invites him out for dinner. Angry at life for ruining his career, his marriage and his prospects, Dick makes quite a scene at the restaurant. Brenda pities him and drops some money in his coat pocket. Dick does not discover the gift until a bum tries to lift the money from him during his stay at the Salvation Army that night.

The next day, Bob Rusk visits with Brenda at the lonely-hearts office while the prissy receptionist, Monica, is away at lunch. Bob demands that Brenda find him a girl who will bend to his perverse sexual demands. He becomes threatening and eventually forces himself on Brenda. Poor Brenda prays for deliverance as Bob rapes her and then strangles her with his necktie. Bob, the Neck Tie Murderer, flees the scene, but Dick goes to the office shortly afterwards. He is locked out, though Monica has seen him leave the building. She discovers Brenda's corpse inside, and informs the police. She reports to Inspector Oxford of Scotland Yard that Dick, a violent and angry man, was the last person she saw at the office before finding her boss dead. A citywide manhunt for Dick Blaney begins.

Meanwhile, Dick is blissfully unaware that he has become the object of such a hunt, and spends the night at a fancy hotel with girlfriend Babs. The porter reads the newspapers, which publishes an identification of Dick Blaney as the Neck Tie Murder, and calls the police. Dick and Babs also read the paper and flee the hotel before they can be caught. After Dick convinces Babs of his innocence, they decide to hide out at the home of Johnny Porter, a friend. Unfortunately, Johnny's wife is convinced that Dick is a violent murderer and has serious reservations about harboring such a criminal. Dick and Babs decide to go to Paris, and Babs returns to the Globe to pick up some clothes for the trip. Unfortunately, she

runs into Bob Rusk there. He takes her up to his apartment on a pretense and then strangles her. Bob attempts to dispose of Babs' body by putting it in a potato sack and throwing it on the rear of a potato truck. Only later does Bob realize that he has lost his "R" tie-pin, and that Babs may still be clutching it in her dead hand! Bob returns to the potato truck and has several close calls before retrieving his pin. Moments after his narrow escape, two policeman watch flabbergasted as Babs' body rolls off the back of the potato truck on a highway.

The next morning, Dick is on the run and he seeks Bob's help, unaware that he is seeking sanctuary from the Neck Tie Murderer himself. Bob obligingly hides Dick in his apartment, then turns over Dick to the police immediately. Dick is sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of murder. But, Inspector Oxford has some doubts about the case. He discusses these doubts with his busybody wife, a woman obsessed with cooking bizarre meals, and comes to the conclusion that Bob Rusk is actually the man who should be in jail. Dick has come to the same conclusion. He arranges a jailbreak and heads immediately to Bob's apartment. Oxford does likewise, and there, Dick Blaney, Inspector Oxford and the Neck Tie Murderer all meet in one room to end the killing spree once and for all.

COMMENTARY: Alfred Hitchcock was over 70 years old when he directed *Frenzy*, his 52nd motion picture, but the film proves that the master of suspense had not lost his ability (or propensity) to play his audience like a piano. In keeping with Hitch's other thrillers (particularly *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *The Birds*), *Frenzy* is psychologically facile, an examination of a man who commits murder because of a problem with dear old mum in particular, and women in general. Despite this simple explanation, *Frenzy* is wickedly stylish and funny. For students of Hitchcock, there is that old dichotomy too: *Frenzy* is a brilliant balancing act, confident in its deployment of film technique, while at the same time the content (and thematic thrust) of the picture seems distinctly misogynistic. At least one murder (of a woman) is lingered on so lovingly and beautifully by the master's camera that one nearly forgets the brutality of what is being depicted. And oddly, Hitchcock strives for identification with, not distance from, the man

committing these horrible acts.

Frenzy opens with a gliding, aerial shot over London to the tune of a very royal-sounding overture. The camera soon finds a dead woman washed up on the beach of the Thames, a new victim of the Neck-Tie Murderer, just as a politico is informing a crowd that the river is being “cleaned up.” That’s the kind of irony Hitchcock excels in framing, contrasting images with words to foster a kind of icy good humor in his audiences. Viewers do not identify with the murder victim, but are instead encouraged to laugh (or at least feel amused) because the corpse is a punchline in a visual joke. That is clearly Hitchcock’s m.o. for much of *Frenzy*: the distancing of the audience from Robert Rusk’s murderous acts, while actually bolstering sympathy for him as a person.

Much later in the film, Rusk murders the protagonist’s girlfriend, Babs. But again there is a distancing aspect to his crime. As Rusk leads unknowing Babs to her second floor apartment and eventual death, Hitchcock’s camera retreats, literally backing down the staircase, out the front door of the building, and back across the street. To some, this “withdraw” from the murder has been read as a disapproval of Rusk’s behavior. The camera is backing away in disgust from it.

Indeed, in John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), the prologue climaxes when murderer Michael Myers is revealed to be a child and Carpenter’s camera backs up and away in horror from the revelation. But *Frenzy* is a different matter simply because it has not revealed Rusk’s horrid crime against Babs on-camera. Therefore, it simply cannot be registering disgust at his action, not having witnessed it first-hand. Right?

Instead, the pull-back and withdraw, like the humor, distances the audience from the act of murder, an act which, if seen close up, might have fostered sympathy for Babs and killed audience identification with Rusk that, for whatever reason, Hitchcock planned to engender.

In another sequence in *Frenzy*, perhaps the most suspenseful, Rusk hides Babs’ corpse in a potato sack at the rear of the truck, and then realizes that he has left incriminating evidence behind. Desperate,

he returns to the truck and is nearly caught. All along, the scene heightens identification with Rusk. Will he be caught? Will he escape? Will he leave behind evidence that dooms him? These questions are raised (as Vincent Canby and Roger Ebert have both noted in their reviews of the film), and consequently the audience wishes for him to succeed ... to pull this one off. But remember, Rusk is a terrible person, a serial killer of women, and yet viewers are on pins and needles, encouraged to wonder if he'll escape the grasp of the law!

Further identification with Rusk is generated by Hitchcock's food motif, which underlies the film. Throughout *Frenzy*, characters are constantly associated with food, and hence with appetites. The inspector is constantly being served odd meals, courtesy of his strange wife. Fish soup, quail with grapes, pig's feet in tripe, and so on. He endures all of these things, but is left unsatisfied, longing for a good old-fashioned plate of fish and chips.

In comparison, Rusk is a man of appetite who is also unable to sate his hunger with even the ordinary "meals" of his domestic setting. Instead, he must commit murder to feel satisfied. There is a line in the film, "don't squeeze the goods until they're yours," which indicates that Rusk, a grocer, sees women as his "meals" as much as human beings. The on-screen, brutal death of Brenda is a notable example of appetite sated.

Just as Hitchcock's camera lingers on shots of food (bread sticks snapping as the breaking of human fingers is discussed; potatoes rolling about in the truck bed as Rusk seeks desperately to hide Babs' feet and toes in a potato sack), so does he face Brenda's murder with the attitude and energy of a starving man contemplating his feast. Rusk strangles Brenda after raping her, and there is a shot of her eyes going dead, her tongue bulging from her mouth. Here, as in the sequences featuring food, the camera does not shy away from appetites and desires sated. The inference is clear: Brenda sates Rusk's murderous appetites. He kills to feel satisfied the way most of us eat. That connection makes him seem more human, more understandable in his crimes ... hence easier to empathize with. Not surprisingly, the scene concludes with Rusk eating an apple, a kind of after-dinner snack. He's already had his

main course: Brenda.

Hitchcock utilizes humor in at least two critical sequences involving corpses. First, there's the opening scene at the Thames, and secondly the moment when Babs' dead foot kicks Rusk in the face. This sort of humor makes Rusk a figure of amusement, of fun, rather than menace. And then, by backing away from the details of a homicidal spree (the purposeful withdrawal from Babs' apartment) and by linking Rusk's appetites for sex and death with food (thereby forging common ground with the audience since we all have appetites), Hitchcock truly makes his murderer the hero of *Frenzy*.

The "real" star, John Finch, plays Blaney, a character who is violent (he breaks a whiskey glass), self-destructive (prone to drinking), and not particularly likeable. So audience sympathy goes to Rusk almost by default. What does this mean? Is *Frenzy* a debauched entertainment because it deposits viewers into the camp of a serial killer? At least some critics seemed to think so.

Victoria Sullivan, an assistant professor in the English department at New York's City College, wrote an essay about the film for the *New York Times* in July of 1972. She found the film to be primarily about the degradation of women, and furthermore accused critics (such as Vincent Canby) of giving Hitchcock a "pass" anyway because of the technical prowess with which he directed the picture. She wrote:

I suspect that films like *Frenzy* may be sicker and more pernicious than your cheapie humdrum porno flick, because they are slicker, more artistically compelling versions of sado-masochistic fantasies, and because they leave me feeling more angry and more impotent simultaneously¹².

Sullivan undoubtedly has a point about content, but it is important to note that film criticism is not always the same thing as social criticism. As Roger Ebert is fondly (and rightly) prone to remind his readership, it is not *what* a film is about that's important, but *how* that film is about the subject. *Frenzy* tells its story of a psycho killer with visual aplomb, a sense of humor, and a master's skill for

pacing. In other words, how it is about Rusk (through visual associations, through visual contrasts, through film language, and through connections with food, of all things) is more important than the fact that contextually it is about Rusk, clearly a monstrous man and all-round rotten human being.

Sullivan takes the opposite approach, that technique means nothing if the subject matter is degrading or inappropriate. For her, the issue is not how Hitchcock tells the story of Rusk, but that Rusk's spree is glorified at all on film.

What is presented for us then is a debate between two camps of criticism. This reviewer tends to side with Canby only because the other road can lead, ultimately, to censorship. *Frenzy* is violent. It is about a nasty, horrible man who brutalizes women. But it is also the film Hitchcock—an artist—wanted to make ... and he made it well. It would be a mistake to take away his right to make the film simply because the subject matter was not deemed worthy by some aspect of society.

Yet, Sullivan is not at all wrong in her assertion that Hitchcock champions Rusk in *Frenzy*, and one has to wonder what he was up to there. Though critics who look for a deeper psychological meaning in Hitchcock's films might quibble, especially considering the violence directed against women in *Psycho* and *The Birds*, this reviewer senses that in *Frenzy* Hitchcock was simply doing something he couldn't do before.

The 1970s brought what was known as "the new freedom" to films, a liberty to show more violence and more nudity. In *Frenzy*, Hitchcock was simply taking advantage of that, pushing the boundaries as it were. And, when one considers his fly-in-the-ointment, sardonic nature, one might put forward an even better answer. He makes his audience identify with Rusk in *Frenzy* simply because he *can*. Hitchcock enjoys playing his audience like a piano, and here he pulls off the ultimate high-wire act: depicting graphic violence against women, at the same time making the perpetrator of such actions a figure of heroism, or at least empathy. It is a daring move, but Hitchcock had an unmatched expertise with the building blocks of film (*mise en scène* and editing, particularly), and *Frenzy* seems to be a bid to re-establish his eminence in this domain.

On some thematic level, *Frenzy* may be reprehensible, dangerous even, but on the technical level it is close to perfect. And besides, an opposite argument about *Frenzy* could easily be made. By asking his audience to identify with Rusk, Hitchcock is acknowledging that there is the seed, the capacity for evil, in all men, and that we should have sympathy nonetheless. That's not an unworthy message in an age (and a genre) where horror is often seen as coming from outside of humanity (*The Exorcist*, *Blood on Satan's Claw*) rather than being engendered by it. And, the idea of the anti-hero was quite popular in the 1970s, so Hitchcock, in his inimitable way, gives cinema the ultimate anti-(social) hero: Robert Rusk, the smiling grocer and devourer of women.

***Frogs* (1972) * ***

Critical Reception

“...doesn’t quite pack the punch that *Squirm* does, but it still comes across as an enjoyably hokey thriller ... enough uneasy moments to pass the time.”—Dr. Cyclops, *Fangoria* # 30, October 1983, page 44.

“Most of the cast, beginning with Ray Milland, deserve annihilation. Selfish and boring, they weigh the picture down so that what happens to them is unimportant.”—Deirdre Mack, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIII, Number 5, May 1972, page 311.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ray Milland (Jason Crockett); Sam Elliott (Pickett Smith); Joan Van Ark (Karen Crockett); Adam Roarke (Clint Crockett); Judy Pace (Bella); Lynn Borden (Jenny); Mae Mercer (Maybelle); David Gilliam (Michael); Nicholas Cortland (Kenneth); George Skaff (Stuart); Lance Taylor, Sr. (Charles); Holly Irving (Iris); Dale Willingham (Tina); Hal Hodges (Jay); Carolyn Fitzimmons (Lady in Car); Robert Sanders (Boy in Car).

CREW: American International Pictures, and Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson present an American International Production in Association with Peter Thomas Productions and George Edward, *Frogs*. *Director of Photography:* Mario Tosi. *Production Manager:* Elliot Schick. *Production Executive:* William J. Immerman. *Post-Production Supervisor:* Salvatore Bilitteri. *Music composed and played by:* Les Baxter. *Music Supervisor:* Al Simms. *Electronic Effects:* Joe Sidore.

Film Editor: Fred R. Feitshans. *Assistant Editor:* James L. Honore. *Effects Editor:* Gene Corso. *Title:* Rabin. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Services. *Color:* Movielab. *Cars Furnished by:* Chrysler Corp. *Boats by:* Glastron Boat Company. *Assistant Director:* Rusty Meek. *Wardrobe:* Phyllis Garr. *Camera Operator:* Jose L. Mignone. *Gaffer:* Michael Jones. *Key Grip:* Myron Schindler. *Property Master:* Mike Ross. *Sound Mixer:* John Speak. *Script Supervisor:* Tom Moore. *Make-up:* Tom Burman. *Hairdresser:* Jean Austin. *Publicity:* Julian E. Myers. *Transportation Captain:* Skip Hitchcock. *Production Associate:* Chuck Minsky, Carolyn Fitzsimmons. *Production Secretary:* Christine Minsky. *Assistant to Producer:* Sal Grasso. *Executive Producer:* Norman T. Herman. *Produced by:* George Edwards, Peter Thomas. *Screenplay by:* Robert Hutchison, Robert Blees. *Story by:* Robert Hutchison. *Directed by:* George McCowan. Shot entirely on location in Eden Park Historical Museum, Florida, U.S.A. Locations by Cinemobile Systems. An American International Picture. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 91 minutes.

P.O.V

“I’m not touching one damned frog”¹³.—Ray Milland, on his amphibian co-stars.

“I hate them. They’re cold, slimy and they pee all over you”¹⁴.—Producer George Edwards echoes Milland’s sentiments.

SYNOPSIS: Photographer and environmental enthusiast Pickett Smith photographs the wildlife in and around Crockett island until he is thrown from his canoe by a motorboat drive-by. The motorboat is manned by Clint Crockett and his beautiful sister, Karen, and the duo quickly returns to fish Pickett out of the drink. Clint apologizes, and offers to take Pickett back to the luxurious Crockett estate to dry off and share a meal. While befriending Karen, Pickett accepts the offer.

Once on the island, Pickett meets the patriarch of the family, Karen's grandfather, Jason. He is a nasty, selfish tyrant who rules his family with iron fist. Among his guests for this Fourth of July weekend are Clint's wife and children, Jason's other son, Michael, dotty old Aunt Iris, fey cousin Kenny, and his African-American girlfriend, Bella. All of them fear Jason Crockett, but obey his wishes because they stand to inherit the family fortune when he dies. Today, Crockett has a bee in his bonnet about Grover, a family employee who has disappeared in the woods. Worse, there is an overabundance of frogs on the island this season and they are becoming an irritant. Pickett offers to search the island for Grover and examine the frog problem. Once in the swampland, he finds Grover's jeep ... and his half-eaten corpse.

Pickett reports to Jason Crockett that the island wildlife, including frogs, snakes and lizards, seem to be rallying for a battle against the Crockett family ... which has poisoned and polluted much of the island environment. Crockett believes this a preposterous idea, and does not even inform the family of the death, not wishing to spoil the Independence Day celebration (or his own birthday party).

The holiday, however, does not go well. Crockett's son Michael is killed in the woods by spiders. Kenneth is murdered in the greenhouse by lizards that asphyxiate him (by knocking over poison bottles in the secluded area). Then Iris is killed in pursuit of a butterfly as leeches and snakes take their turns at the old woman.

The survivors plan to flee Crockett's island, but Jason refuses to let his special day be spoiled. Bella will take no more of Crockett's nonsense and plans to leave the island with Jason's black servants. They all meet an untimely end thanks to attacking birds. At the same time, Clint is killed near his motorboat by poisonous water snakes. Clint's wife is drowned ... by a large turtle.

Pickett plans to torch the frogs, now surrounding the Crockett estate, with gasoline, but the frogs scatter, sensing the danger. Pickett realizes that the best plan is one of escape, and with Karen and Clint's children in tow, plots to leave the island. But stubborn old Crockett won't leave his land on his special birthday. Pickett gathers everyone else, and they canoe off the island, battling frogs, snake and lizards all the way. They even fight crocodiles, but finally

manage to get to the mainland and catch a lift from a passing motorist.

Alone on his island, Crockett watches in horror as swarms of frogs invade his house, smashing through windows. The frogs surround Crockett and hop all over his body as he dies of a heart attack.

COMMENTARY: Nature strikes back in *Frogs*, one of the first “revenge of nature” films of the 1970s. The culprit in this case is decadent, overstuffed man, who pollutes his environment, and causes wildlife (snakes, frogs, birds, crocodiles, spiders, and the like) to challenge him for planetary supremacy.

The film starts rather promisingly, as actor Sam Elliott canoes through a swamp, snapping photographs of the wildlife. As the beautifully lensed scene continues, litter is seen on the landscape and then polluted water and refuse comes into view. The film thus states its point with visuals, revealing how nature and garbage must exist side by side, thanks to human civilization.

Sadly, from that evocative start, the film degenerates rapidly into a series of highly improbable animal attacks. At one point, the preposterous screenplay even has the audacity to suggest that frogs have cut the phone lines at Ray Milland’s mansion! The attacks are also poorly integrated into the action, possible only because each of the characters (or victims) persists in stupidly venturing off alone. Spiders attack Michael while he wanders alone into the swamp. A crocodile (with mouth visibly taped shut), kills another solitary fellow. Yet another character dies when lizards dump over jars of poison in a greenhouse, and he is asphyxiated (!?). You know a movie is struggling for believability when a lizard outsmarts a human being.

This author’s wife is an excellent barometer for bullshit in horror movies. After the third or fourth character in *Frogs* had spontaneously wandered off alone to be killed by little buggers, she tuned out of the film with this *bon mot*, “I can’t watch people do stupid things over and over again.”

The actors struggle vainly to make some of this hokum meaningful but are sabotaged by a dreadful script that requires them to be

idiots. Ray Milland's character, typified by his line "we are the filthy rich," stubbornly plans his birthday party after many of his family and friends have bit the dust. When asked what should be done, he states that he'd like his original dinner menu, as planned. Would anyone, even a jerk, be so stupid and callous? Joan Van Ark is wasted as Milland's spunky daughter, but does provide a great deal of leggy appeal. Elliott has the meatiest role, but still has to contend with corny lines like "What if nature is trying to get back at us?"

With films like this, it is sometimes illuminating to compare it to others of its kind. *Willard*, a movie about rat attacks, was infinitely deeper. The main character seemed to be a real individual, and his "rat revolution" arose logically out of his situation. 1977's *Kingdom of the Spiders* also casts man (and his pesticides) as a villain, but the heroes in that picture (William Shatner, Tiffany Bolling) follow the mystery logically from one step to another, and avoid putting themselves in stupid situations. The spider attacks in that film are relentless, and well orchestrated rather than humorous and improbable.

Another disappointment is the finale. Ray Milland is purportedly surrounded (and then set upon...) by the army of angry frogs. Yet, Milland is never seen in the same shot with even a single frog. Again, *Kingdom of the Spiders* is a helpful contrast. In the climax of that film, spiders literally *rain* upon the besieged Shatner, and the authenticity brings gasps of shock. In *Willard*, Bruce Davison interacted with the rats in several key shots. Here, either the frogs or Milland seems to be phoning in his performance. Or maybe they both are...

*Horror Express (1972) * * **

Critical Reception

"...absurdities make it entertaining—it puts Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing on the Trans-Siberian express together with Telly Savalas as a murderous Cossack and a prehistoric apeman that comes to life and turns out to be possessed by an

alien.”—John Brosnan, *Future Tense*, St. Martin’s Press, 1978, page 217.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Dr. Alexander Saxton); Peter Cushing (Dr. Welles); Angel del Pozo (Yevtushenko); Telly Savalas (Captain); Alberto deMendoza (Miroff); Silvia Tortosa, Julio Pena.

CREW: *Camera Operator:* Teodor Escavisa. *Focus:* Luis Pena. *Assistant:* Simon Lopez. *Sound supervisor:* Antonio Ilan. *Mixing Recordist:* Enrique Molinaro. *Location Recordist:* Luis Lopez Diaz. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Charles Simminger. *Wardrobe:* Andres Fernandez, Carmen Manzano. *Make-up Supervisor:* Julian Ruiz. *Make-up Assistant:* Fernando Florido, Rafael Berraquero. *Hairdressing assistant:* Maria Nieves Ruiz, Romania Gonzalez. *First Assistant Director:* Gil Curretero. *Second Assistant Director:* Vicente Escrими. *Script Clerk:* Maribel Ruiz-Cipilas. *Production Assistant:* Jose Luis Rubio. *Property Master:* Juan Gracia. *Set Assistant:* Rafael Perez Marcia. *Special Effects:* Pablo Perez. *Optical Effects:* Brian Stevens. *Production Supervisor:* Jose Maria Ramos. *Art Director:* Ramiro Gomez. *Editor:* Robert Dearben. *Editorial Assistants:* Carmen Alonso, Fernando Megino. *Music:* John Carav. *Screenplay:* Arnaud D’Usseau and Julian Halevy. *From an original story by:* Gene Martin. *Produced by:* Bernard Gordon. *Directed by:* Gene Martin. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 86 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In 1906, Alexander Saxton reports to the Royal Geological Society about the strange disaster that befell his expedition to Manchuria and the mountains of the Province of Szechuan in China...

There, in the remote mountains, Saxton and his assistants discovered a strange humanoid frozen in the ice. They packed it up

in a crate and brought it back to civilization. They booked passage on the Trans-Siberian express with the corpse in storage, only to learn that it was demonstrating amazing powers. It blinded and killed two people early on. Dr. Saxton's competitor, Dr. Wells, was also on the train, and he hired someone to break open the crate ... for the sake of curiosity. What resulted was yet another murder (of a baggage man), and a monster on the loose. Saxton feared that his missing link was alive after 2 million years and sure enough, the mysterious creature began to kill again, murdering soldiers that scoured the train to learn its hiding place.

Later, Wells and Saxton made a terrifying discovery. The victims of the monster had completely smooth brains with no wrinkles, which suggested that their minds had somehow been drained of memory and knowledge. Wells hypothesized that it was in this way that the monster was able to absorb knowledge from other life forms. After several more encounters, the creature was killed and the threat believed over, but in fact, the monster merely jumped into or "possessed" another living human being. Events became even more complicated when it was learned that the final image in the monster's eye could be displayed—as if in a photograph. What Saxton and Wells saw in that image was staggering: dinosaurs and the Earth, as they would look from outer space. Saxton now believed that the creature was an alien life form that had crashed on Earth and existed in several bodies, including that of the missing link, for aeons. And now it was awake, and malevolent. Wells agreed with that notion, and suggested that the monster was like a disease, infecting new bodies. Wells and Saxton then scanned the eyes of all train passengers to determine if they too were monsters.

In fact, the monster had jumped into the body of an inspector and was hoping to find a way to escape into space and return home. To this end, he absorbed the train engineer, who had a rudimentary knowledge of rocketry.

Just when it seemed things couldn't get worse, a team of heavily armed Russian soldiers boarded the train and put everyone under arrest as the situation was studied. The monster made short work of the soldiers, and then did the unthinkable, reviving them as an army of evil.

Saxton, Wells and the surviving passengers fled the army of the walking dead, and sought safety in one compartment. They wired Moscow with orders to destroy the train, and then unhooked their car from the rest. Saxton and Wells watched with satisfaction as the remainder of the train—and the monster from space—went over the edge of a cliff and burned on the side of a mountain far below.

COMMENTARY: *Horror Express* is like *The Thing* (1951) meets *Murder on the Orient Express* meets *The Hidden* (1987). And, surprisingly, it's a pretty good yarn too. Its tale of an identity-absorbing alien trying to get home (and escape from Earth) benefits from its isolated setting (the Trans-Siberian Express ... in motion), and the solid, restrained performance of its leads, old hands at this material both, Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing.

The first shot of the film, a long pan across a wide mountain range, establishes a sense of place. There is a pale sky overhead, the sound of wind roaring ferociously on the soundtrack, and the audience's instinctive reaction is to hunker down and shiver from the almost tangible sense of cold. The fog-covered mountains of Szechuan then reveal something much more frightening than the cold, a cave containing a frozen humanoid (no, not Trog...).

The thrill of such a discovery quickly gives way to horror as people start to die, and it's a good set-up. With its frozen setting one thinks immediately of both versions of *The Thing*, and even its source story, "Who Goes There?" The reality of the picture is also heightened by Christopher Lee's opening voice-over narration, told in the form of a report to the Royal Geological Society. This narration, which reads and sounds like a correspondence, lends the early sequences of *Horror Express* an almost documentary-style feel. Considering the amazing developments that soon follow this opening, it's a good idea to ground the film in what, on first blush, could be mistaken for scientific minutiae.

In a film like this, the monster is very important. How many horror movies have failed because their monsters simply could not live up to expectations once revealed? *Night of the Blood Beast* (1958), *It, the Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) and even Hawks' *The Thing* pop to mind immediately. So, for a "monster" picture to work, the creature has to be scary. In crafting their "beast," the makers of *Horror*

Express have created a memorable monster, because, for the most part, very little is revealed (beyond the ape-man at the start of the picture, which is actually just a “shell” hiding the *real* monster). What can be deciphered for sure is that the alien boasts glowing red eyes, and the mental ability to mesmerize its victims. Then, as it sucks dry their minds, the victims bleed profusely out of their eyes and nose, a horrible side-effect of the absorption. Finally, before dying, the victims go blind, their eyes shifting to a stark white. That series of images, first of blood streaming like tears from eye sockets, then of corpses defiled by those blank, white, eyes, are extremely effective ones. So, the alien is defined not so much by how it looks, by what it does. An elegant solution to the fact that there was not yet technology (or the money) to create an *Alien* (1979)-caliber monster.

Impressively, *Horror Express* is rather ambitious in its thinking, even beyond the details of the creature. The movie keeps throwing in inspired twists, most of them unexpected. For instance, Lee and Cushing, in typical dispassionate fashion, determine that the eye fluid of the monster retains the last image the creature saw before dying. They find a way to magnify that image, and see the Earth as viewed from outer space—proving the existence of alien life. That discovery sheds some light on the monster’s motives, as it absorbs human after human in hopes of discovering the knowledge that will help it return to its home in the stars. This is an unexpected turn of events, but one that gracefully leads to the final act.

The “jumping from body to body” alien is a genre cliché today, but one must remember it had not been done so frequently in the early ’70s, when *Horror Express* was made. *The Hidden* plumbed the same material in the mid-’80s, offering the world a rock-’n’-roll alien who loved fast cars. *Horror Express* never gets that jiggy with the material, content instead to fill a moving train with death and horror.

Contrarily, one must also note that instead of looking forward, *Horror Express*’s climax references Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. The dead return to life as white-eyed ghouls to attack the living. Yet even if the finale is derivative, the remainder of the film is notably ambitious in keeping audience expectations rattled. The monster is

first a missing link, a beast, then a shape-shifter, then an alien, and finally a puppet master pulling the strings of the dead. These shifts in technique (and shape) keep the film's horror rolling, and generate a fair amount of paranoia.

What differentiates *Horror Express* from a truly brilliant picture of this category, like *John Carpenter's The Thing* (1981), is that there seems to be no real sub-text in *Express*. Carpenter's picture explored the frailty of the flesh, how humanity could be warped and perverted by the unseen intruder (disease). It also explored human relations to a high degree, calling into question our ability to trust our neighbors, our friends, when frightened. *Horror Express* lacks the visual artistry, as well as the thematic depth, to be anything beyond what it appears to be: a fast-paced horror movie that pauses to validate the concept of evolution ("It's a fact, and there's no morality in fact," says Christopher Lee's character, of evolution). It's a clever hybrid of *Murder on the Orient Express*, with every character on the train hiding a secret identity or agenda, and the horror films of the 1950s. And it moves.

All aboard...

I Dismember Mama (aka Poor Albert and Little Annie) (1972) *

Critical Reception

"...the title here is not only tasteless, it is misleading. Though psychotic killer Albert demonstrates his carving technique on assorted nurses, housekeepers, department-store mannequins and ladies of the night, he never does get to work on his mother. The title tells us more about the psychological hang-ups of the filmmakers than it does about the action on-screen."—Harry and Michael Medved, *The Golden Turkey Awards*, A Perigee Book, 1980, page 27.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Zooey Hall (Albert Robertson); Joanne

Moore Jordan (Mrs. Robertson); Greg Mullavey (Detective); Marlene Tracy (Alice); Frank Whiteman (Dr. Burton); Elaine Partnow (Nurse); Rosella Olson (Girl in Poolroom); James Tartain (Attendant); Roger Christopher (Man in Poolroom); Geri Reischl (Annie).

CREW: From Simitar Entertainment Inc., and Screen Gems. *Director of Photography:* William Swenning. *Camera Operator:* Mark Rasmussen. *Sound:* Kirk Francis. *Lighting:* Parker Bartlett. *Script Supervisor:* Joseph Bean. *Assistant Editor:* Justin DuPont. *Boom Operator:* John Westmoreland. *Grips:* Terry Meacham, Reuben Leder. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Herschel Burke Gilbert. *Song "Poor Albert" Lyrics by:* Rocket Roden. *Music by:* Herschel Burke Gilbert. *Sung by:* Rocket Roden. *Screenplay:* William Norton. *Associate Producer:* Jack Marshall. *Producer:* Leon Roth. *Director:* Paul Leder. *Color by:* Pacific Film Industries. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Albert Robertson is incarcerated in a low-security mental hospital, where he watches movie after movie on his projector. Then, one day, Albert attacks his nurse, disrobing her and attempting to strangle her. Although this attempt is thwarted by two security guards, it signals a bad downturn in Albert's behavior.

Albert informs his psychiatrist, Dr. Burton, that his mother is to blame for all his problems. He accuses his mother of being "a whore," and Dr. Burton replies that Albert's problems stem from his belief that all women are whores. Though Albert wants to be released from the hospital, his violent behavior assures that it will not happen, and in fact, a transfer to the maximum-security state hospital is highly likely. As Dr. Burton calls Mrs. Robertson to inform her of the bad news, Albert kills a guard and escapes from the hospital. The police are informed of the situation, and the hunt for Albert Robertson is on.

Soon, Albert calls to tell his mother that he cannot wait to see her. He steals a white convertible, and heads to the fancy Robertson

estate. Once at home, Albert terrorizes the new housekeeper, Alice, asking if she is a virgin. He attacks her with a knife and then orders her to take off her clothes and sing and dance for him. At the end of this little show, a sexually confused and impotent Albert kills Alice. Then, little Annie, Alice's pre-pubescent daughter, arrives at the Robertson home. She meets Albert, and he lies to her, telling her that her mom is away at a doctor's appointment. Believing young Annie to be the only pure woman he has ever known, Albert takes a shine to the girl and performs a bullfighting dance for her. He gives her candy and then takes her to an amusement park called Magic Mountain.

When Magic Mountain turns out to be closed, Albert escorts Annie on a romantic trolley ride, and later a boat ride on a lake. Meanwhile, the police discover Alice's corpse, and realize that Albert has come home. At the same time, Albert caters to young Annie's every wish because she is "undefiled." He takes her to a hotel, built in the Victorian age, and they share the bridal suite, going so far as to have a mock wedding ceremony. Happy with his new "friend," Albert telephones home again and tells his mother that he needs money so he can go away with Annie.

That night, Albert's psychosis surges and he fights the urge to attack little Annie as she sleeps. Instead, he leaves the suite, seeking sex at a local pool hall. He meets a sexy blonde there, and brings her to the room. He asks her to dance for money, and she disrobes and tries to seduce him. Albert responds with anger and strangles the woman. Annie witnesses the crime and flees the hotel room, seeking sanctuary in a dark mannequin storeroom. There, Albert has a change of heart and decides that Annie is just as much a whore as the rest of womanhood. Armed with a meat cleaver, Albert pursues Annie, but at the last moment of a chase he missteps and falls from a high window to the alley far below. The police arrive to save Annie, and Albert's days of freedom are over.

COMMENTARY: Disclaimer: No mothers are dismembered in this movie. Instead, the title is probably the cleverest aspect of this rather underwhelming, illegitimate grandchild of *Psycho*. For those who don't remember, the film's name is a bizarre reference to the classic TV series *I Remember Mama* (1949–1956), and the feature

film of the same name. As a title for an exploitation flick, *I Dismember Mama* is actually rather good. It suggests a droll, fun quality of horror. It hints of a satire or spoof of the “white bread” sitcom life depicted in the old *Father Knows Best*-era TV series. Sadly, none of those elements come to play in the actual production. Instead, the title is mere exploitation, the film is not smart, not even in the neighborhood of funny, and its bad taste, not the sort you’d see in *Scary Movie*, is of a genuinely disturbing, and depraved variety. Succinctly put, the film’s horror comes from a sensitive topic: an adult’s sexual obsession with an eleven-year-old girl. It isn’t exactly a savory or sensitive bit of work.

To get the good out of the way first, the performances and technical credits for this low-budget cheapie are solid. Though the film is shot to resemble a colorful TV series more than a film, it is a competent job. However, what is thoroughly objectionable about the film is its script, a screenplay that repeatedly puts a little girl in real physical danger from a murderous sexual predator.

There is a longstanding debate in horror circles about the role of children in the genre. Some critics immediately “sign off” a movie when a child’s life is put in jeopardy on-screen. The late Gene Siskel, for instance, gave *Aliens* (1986) a “thumbs down” vote because little Newt was constantly endangered. This viewer does not subscribe to that kind of thinking. Newt was an important character in that film, and it would not have made sense for a race of gruesome, slimy aliens to treat a child as though she were special. Imagine how the critics would have complained if drooling, acid-spitting gut-bursters showed favoritism to a small child?

Similarly, the remake of *The Blob* (1988) also endangered children (and in fact, killed one), but again, it did not seem inappropriate considering the context.

Yet *I Dismember Mama* makes one feel dirty about watching because its main concern is not just violence, but sex. The film makes it plain that Albert sees little Annie as a possible sexual conquest, and that is a really disturbing thing to see in a film with no aspirations to be anything but entertainment. Here is a character that treats all women as whores, unless they are children. That could make for an interesting film, no doubt, since terrible things do happen to people;

and there are many strange points of view in the human world. The problem here is that it is done with little skill or artistry. Is it possible to make a good movie about child molestation, or sexual predators? Probably, but is a grade Z horror movie with a lurid title really the right place to attempt the tackling of so serious-minded a topic?

Perhaps it comes down to where one draws the line. For instance, this film features some effective, suspenseful scenes, all based on the main notion (again) that Albert is finally going to lose his mind, and rape little Annie (an eleven year old). The suspense is genuine because the threat is genuine. The audience is afraid for the little girl, having seen Albert's violence. But the question remains: Is it necessary to go to such lengths to make a suspenseful movie? Annie could have been 14, 16, or 18, and the same suspense would have been generated, but the film would not have openly endangered a girl who is clearly a child.

As an objective reviewer, this author can note with a sense of appreciation how thoroughly effective it is to crosscut between the antics of Annie and Albert, and the dead body of her mother in an upstairs bedroom. However, is it really something one wants to see in a horror film? The point is clear: Albert has already terrorized this child (by killing her mother), and she is not even aware of the danger she is in, or the damage that has been done. Yuck.

Part of the problem is that *I Dismember Mama* goes to special lengths to sympathize with Albert's twisted point of view. "Poor Albert, can you tell me where you are? Poor Albert, can you take your lover very far?" the sympathetic theme song croaks melodically. Poor Albert? Poor *Albert*? What about poor Annie, who has lost the love of her mother forever, and is caught in the hands of a psychotic killer? Why is there no song to help the viewer identify with *her* plight? And the song's lyrics even identify Annie as Albert's lover ... another really icky moment. She certainly does not see herself in those terms, and that the music would do so is really troubling.

It is hard to say when a horror movie is out of bounds, and indeed, many critics differ on that point. For this author, *The Last House on the Left* is a brilliantly constructed film that rejects violence

outright, but which is nonetheless violent. Wes Craven's picture is artistic, even though its subject is brutal, messy, and ugly. Others see the same work as an incitement to violence, and a really sick movie. For this reviewer, *I Dismember Mama* is in bad taste because it exploits a serious, ugly topic (child molestation) but makes no final, deep, or interesting point about the so-called "beautiful" game that Albert plays.

In what may be one of the sickest scenes in horror cinema, Albert dresses Annie in a nightgown, and they celebrate a wedding ceremony. At Annie's age, she has no idea what this "dress up" is a precursor to. Adult viewers are all too aware of what it portends for Annie. Unfortunately, there are sick people in this world who hurt children. Unfortunately, there is pain in the world. But is it really necessary to feature this particular ugliness in (bad) entertainment?

This author does not believe in censorship. He is not part of the moral majority. He believes horror should be free to express whatever demons drive its creators. Yet, by the same token, he makes choices as a viewer, and perhaps there is no way to objectively validate those choices. Some movies go too far (and are perceived to go too far), and for this reviewer, *I Dismember Mama* is one of those. Other viewers may draw the line somewhere else, and that's fine too.

The Last House on the Left (1972) * * * *

Critical Reception

"...contains moments of squirm-in-your seat horror which genre movies of ten times its budget and sophistication cannot or dare not approach. The movie amply displays Craven's unique talent for tapping into the middle American nightmare ... even as a beginner, Craven had a knack for setting up a tense, frightening situation and keeping his audience off balance with a mix of visceral shocks and black humor."—David A. Szulkin, *Wes Craven's Last House on the Left, the Making of a Cult Classic*, A Fab Press Publication, October 1997, page 8.

“*Last House* begins by depicting opposites, gradually blurring barriers, until the audience’s emotional involvement with violent actions leads not to catharsis but self-disgust and self-awareness.... It is an extremely complex film that unveils an ugly sadistic lust most horror films pander to.”—Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*, Associated University Presses, 1996, page 130.

“The filmmakers seem to get great pleasure from the torture, sexual humiliation and killing of two truly sweet teenage girls. *The Last House on the Left* is a sick sexual fantasy for predators that is indeed an ‘incitement to violence.’”—Danny Peary, *Cult Movies*, Delacorte Press, 1981, page 348.

“The film has little style and little humor but it is marked by documentary-like intensity.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Publications International, Ltd., 1983, page 147.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Sandra Cassell (Mari Collingwood); Lucy Grantham (Phyllis Stone); David A. Hess (Krug Stillo); Fred Lincoln (Fred “Weasel” Podowski); Marc Sheffler (Junior Stillo); Jeramie Rain (Sadie); Gaylord St. James (John Collingwood); Cynthia Carr (Estelle Collingwood); Ada Washington (Ada); Marshall Anker (Sheriff); Martin Kove (Deputy Harry); Ray Edwards (Postman).

CREW: Sean S. Cunningham Films Ltd., The Night Company. *Director of Photography:* Victor Hurwitz. *Original Music:* David Alexander Hess. *Producer:* Sean S. Cunningham. *Writer/ Director:* Wes Craven. *Film Editor:* Wes Craven. *Assistant Editor:* Stephen Miner. *Costume Design:* Susan S. Cunningham.

Assistant Director: Yvonne Hannemann. *Associate Producer:* Katherine D'Amato. *Sound:* Jim Hubbard. *Gaffer:* Dick Donovan. *Production Assistant:* Steve Miner. *Wardrobe and Make-up:* Anne Paul. *Special Effects:* Troy Roberts. *Mix:* R.S.I. *Sound Mixer:* Gary Leibman. *Opticals and Blow-Up:* The Optical House. *Title Design:* David Miner. *Unit Production Manager:* Larry Beinhart. *From Lobster Enterprises.* MPAA *Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 82 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Beautiful Mari Collingwood turns 17 and prepares to go to a "Bloodlust" concert in New York City. Her parents argue about her revealing attire and the violent nature of Bloodlust, a band that once dismembered a chicken on stage. After the quarrel, Mari and her friend Phyllis drink champagne in the beautiful woods behind the Collingwood house, and imagine what it would be like to make love to the members of the band.

Phyllis and Mari arrive in New York City and find reality far different from their imagination. While trying to score some weed, the two girls are abducted by notorious prison escapee (and psychopath) Krug Stillo, a child molester called Fred "the Weasel" Podowsky, Stillo's junkie son Junior, and a "feral" lesbian named Sadie. While the Collingwoods unknowingly bake a birthday cake for Mari in clean fun, Mari undergoes a catalogue of horrors, and is forced to watch Stillo rape Phyllis. The next morning, the thugs shove the two girls into their car trunk, and drive them out to the country to have some vicious fun with them.

Mari learns that she has been taken to the woods behind her parents' very house, but is unable to call for help. Krug and his buddies murder Phyllis when she tries to escape, and Krug rapes Mari while the others watch. After he has carved his name into Mari's chest with a knife, Krug shoots her in the head, and puts her out of her misery. The thugs clean up, but find their car has broken down. While local police race to the scene to stop the convicts, the thugs stay for dinner at the Collingwood house.

That night, Mrs. Collingwood learns that the four guests in her home are actually the murderers of her daughter. With Mr. Collingwood, she conspires to give the criminals a taste of their own

medicine. The cops are still en route, but their car runs out of gas, leaving the Collingwoods to take justice into their own hands. Mrs. Collingwood lures Fred outside, and under pretense of fellatio, bites off his penis. She then wrestles Sadie in the family pool and slashes her throat with a switchblade. Junior, the sensitive guy of the gang, commits suicide by blowing his brains out with Krug's pistol. The police arrive just as Mr. Collingwood carves up the villainous Krug Stillo with a chainsaw...

COMMENTARY: When Wes Craven wrote the screenplay for *The Last House on the Left* (reportedly over a period of four days), he designed the film as a re-interpretation of the 1958 Ingmar Bergman film called *The Virgin Spring*. Accordingly, there are many similarities between Craven's loose adaptation of the material and Bergman's acclaimed motion picture. What makes each film particularly interesting is context. Bergman tells his story in a world of religion whereas Craven depicts his in a world completely lacking it. *The Virgin Spring* template—now re-imagined for the Vietnam/hippie generation—results in a highly thoughtful, provocative, and disturbing film. Though *The Last House on the Left* has been reviled as a violent, ugly picture, it is also an honest one. It does not glorify violence, and, indeed, depicts how violent impulses dwell within us all.

Briefly summarized, *The Virgin Spring* is a re-telling of the medieval German ballad known as *Tore's Daughter*. It's the story of a physician (played by Max Von Sydow in the film) and the events leading up to the murder of his beloved, and much-indulged daughter, Karin. Her murderers are three unwashed herdsmen, who intercept her while she is on the way to church to light candles for the Virgin Mary.

In *Last House on the Left*, it is spoiled middle-class American Mari Collingwood (daughter of Dr. Collingwood) who is murdered by thugs. She is also on the way to a so-called pilgrimage, this time a rock concert—a fact revealing how civilization has changed.

In *The Virgin Spring*, Dr. Tore and his wife (Mareta) commit revenge against the herdsmen, who by a strange twist of fate stay at their home for the evening. This unexpected plot twist is also established in Craven's film, but with John Collingwood brandishing a

chainsaw against his enemies rather than a butcher's knife.

The innocent youth tortured by the images of the dead girl is also translated to Craven's universe. In *The Virgin Spring* he is a ten-year-old child (who Tore kills mercilessly anyway...), but in *The Last House on the Left* he is Junior, a young adult, who commits suicide because of his anguish.

Even Mareta's (Tore's wife's) overriding hatred for the servant girl Ingeri is carried over in *The Last House on the Left* when Estelle Collingwood expresses severe disapproval of Phyllis, a girl from a different social class than Mari.

Where these two stories differ is not in detail or character type, but in religious conviction. In *The Virgin Spring*, Dr. Tore's wife blames herself for Karin's death because she loved her daughter more than she loved God. For Dr. Tore, the matter is one of faith. He wonders how God can allow such monstrosities to occur in his world. "You see it and you allow it! The innocent child's death and my revenge, you allowed it!" He cries in despair. In his confusion, Tore swears to erect a church in the wild where Karin's corpse now lies cold. In response to this act of faith, God causes a spring to bubble there. In a high angle shot focusing on the dead Karin, Bergman's camera captures the mystery of faith, and the birth of this beautiful spring. With the questioning of God and the miracle of the virgin spring, Bergman's film confirms the existence of a Christian God who watches over man, even if he does not intervene when horrible events occur.

Clearly then, *The Virgin Spring* views the world in a religious context, and the characters are overtly demonstrative in their faith. They pray before every meal, and Mareta burns her wrists with the fire of a candle every Friday, in memory of Christ's day of agony. Perhaps more significantly, the protagonists in the Bergman picture question God and their own faith and in the climax are rewarded when God grants them a miracle to buttress their faith.

In pointed contrast, there is no suggestion of an afterlife or God in *The Last House on the Left*. The theme song of the picture, oft repeated during the film, is titled "The Road Leads to Nowhere" and it implies that life is a voyage with but one destination: death. Since

God is non-existent and the road leads nowhere, *The Last House on the Left* reveals itself to be existentialist, even nihilistic, in its approach to horror.

To wit: terrible things happen to innocent people in the Craven film, and “good people” like the Collingwoods resort to brutal violence and bloodlust with little regret. Though Mari prays before she is killed, in a scene staged in nearly identical fashion to Karin’s rape in *The Virgin Spring*, there is no salvation for her, or redemption for her fallen parents. Unlike the Tores in *The Virgin Spring*, the Collingwoods are not enlightened by the existence of God, or an awareness of some divine method. Instead, they are left in a shattered living room filled only with the blood of villains. Craven’s camera does not swoop heavenward to give the impression of God’s presence, because in *The Last House on the Left*, God is dead.

A flaw of most remakes is the slavish nature by which they attempt to recreate the original. *The Last House on the Left* is a great film because Craven has excised the theological context of *The Virgin Spring* and substituted an equally provocative secular philosophy. His film reflects a godless world. Unlike Bergman, Craven does not treat Karin, Dr. Tore, Mareta and the servant girl Ingeri (Phyllis in *Last House*) as game pieces to be manipulated by God’s master plan, but as realistic people caught in a universe of purposeless, random violence. After Mari’s rape, any sensible viewer of *The Last House on the Left* will thirst for Krug’s death. Yet when Craven finally depicts this murder (and the murder of Krug’s cohorts), there is no sense of joy or accomplishment, only a deep-seated sense of shame and anger.

The Last House on the Left’s final moment is not a reaffirmation of faith or a celebration of violence, but a moment of grim contemplation. The Collingwoods have been as ruthlessly violent and merciless as Mari’s attackers, and nothing has been gained by their savage revenge. Mari is dead, and the road still leads nowhere. The climactic shot of *The Last House on the Left* indicates that John and Mrs. Collingwood have lost more than their child. They have lost themselves and the life of “innocent” morality they imagined they shared. They have committed murder, and for what? Their

house is still empty; as the film's soundtrack asserts, "The castle stays the same."

By freeze-framing on the faces of the shattered middle-class family, the closing shot of *The Last House on the Left* reveals the futility of bloodshed and retribution in a manner the uplifting finale of *The Virgin Spring* does not. The final image of human agony lingers, and is therefore forced down the throats of theatergoers. It is the image they leave the theater with; that they carry home. There is no triumphant music on the soundtrack, no heroic overture indicating the issuance of "justice," only a still-life photograph of faces in pain. By concluding with such a downcast note, the film actually serves as an argument against violence and revenge. It is clear that it is not so much the death of Mari that has taken its toll on the Collingwoods, but rather the unexpected realization that they are no better than the people who so casually murdered her.

In at least one way, *The Last House on the Left* is a more responsible and moral film than *The Virgin Spring* because of this thorough condemnation of violence. The final image of Craven's film is not a beautiful, bubbling spring that puts aside the violence of the past and suggests the existence of God, but rather the frozen portrait of two shattered human beings. *The Last House on the Left* finds no validation for revenge, whereas *The Virgin Spring* suggests that horrible acts of violence will be forgiven by God and that there is redemption, if one looks for it in religion. Erecting a church in God's name, for instance, washes one's hands forever of bloodshed. In an age and society where people bomb abortion clinics or murder doctors who perform abortions, this is a dangerous argument.

Where *The Virgin Spring* takes Dr. Tore and his wife off the hook for their violence by allowing God to forgive their trespasses, *The Last House on the Left* leaves the Collingwoods responsible for their own actions. And, because it so daringly re-interprets the context of Bergman's story, as a tale of man's violent nature (instead of one wherein God moves in mysterious ways), it is far more meaningful to a society where retribution, via capital punishment, is legally mandated.

If the final frame of the movie, that of the shattered Collingwoods presiding over an empty castle, is Craven's destination, it is

fascinating to examine how he arrives there. The two families (Krug and Collingwoods) are paralleled throughout the film to suggest that they have more in common than first meets the eye. First, both families are seen in the same circumstances. As the film begins, John Collingwood sits in the living room of his home and reads the newspaper while ignoring his wife. The camera later finds Krug in his home where the mother figure, Sadie, is similarly ignored.

After the first few scenes indicating parallel family circumstances, and an interesting segment wherein Sadie yearns to be a lady with the noble-sounding name Agatha Greenwood (not unlike Estelle Collingwood), Craven's film crosscuts between the activities of the two families with regularity. In the Collingwood home, husband and wife frolic in their kitchen as Estelle spreads creamy icing over Mari's birthday cake. After cross-cutting to the Krug household, the thug declares to Sadie that he is the "cream" of American manhood and makes similar, if more blunt, advances on the matriarch of his family.

After Mari and Phyllis are detained, Craven again cuts back to the Collingwoods as John declares to his wife, "I want to attack you." From there, the scene switches back yet again as Mari and Phyllis are physically assaulted by Krug and Weasel.

The cross-cutting establishes a spiritual connection between the two families even before they have met. John expresses his will to attack, and Krug does just that. This bond will blossom throughout the movie, and the final similarity between families is that they both stoop to heinous acts of violence before the movie's end. The final freeze-frame on the Collingwoods is not dissimilar to an earlier shot of Sadie, Weasel and Krug at the lake following Mari's rape. The killers realize what they have done—raped two girls and murdered them—and they stand in the composition looking ashamed, much as John and Estelle feel after dispatching their opponents in the film's denouement.

The Last House on the Left is a powerful debut for director Craven, and is not an easy film to watch. But sometimes the best films aren't easy to watch, are they? *Platoon* (1986), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Schindler's List* (1994) and *The Virgin*

Spring (1958) are critically praised films that also face human ugliness, and *The Last House on the Left* has a great deal in common with them. However, it is a far less palatable vision to many viewers and scholars because there is no barrier separating the filmmaker from his audience. *Platoon* is set in Vietnam. *Natural Born Killers* is pointedly satirical, existing outside the confines of our real world. *A Clockwork Orange* occurs in a future society. *Schindler's List* remembers a specific time and place: Germany in the era of the holocaust. *The Virgin Spring* is a medieval story told in a religious context. All of these films thus have an element of safety to them because they do not confront the audience with horrors in a place and time where those horrors dwell on a day-to-day basis. After *Platoon's* climax, a viewer can click off the TV and satisfy himself that Vietnam, and its remembered atrocities, are halfway around the world, and the result of a different decade.

As its title reminds us, *The Last House on the Left* happens next door. There is no artifice in the movie's structure to protect the audience, no setting as remote as Vietnam, World War II or Sweden to make the movie's message more palatable. Instead, Craven's first film makes its well-considered points about violence and retribution in our living rooms and our backyard. Now. For that reason, it is a powerful film, and far harder to accept than the others mentioned here. Since *The Last House on the Left* does not unfold within the safe confines of any given genre, its raw power incites all kinds of uncomfortable feelings, from voyeurism and curiosity, to disgust and shame ... but certainly not violence, as many have claimed.

On the contrary, *The Last House on the Left* is a movie that despises violence in every frame. It is less offensive than "popular" vigilante movies such as *Death Wish* (1975), because it doesn't laud "eye-for-an-eye" justice. Instead, it offers a succinct (if bloody...) statement about the role of violence in our society and our families.

***The Mark of the Devil* (1972) ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Herbert Lom (the Witch Finder); Olivera Vuco (Vanessa Benedict); Udo Kier (Baron

Christian); Reggie Nalder (Albino); Herbert Fux, Michael Maien, Ingeborg Schoener, Johannes Buzalski, Gaby Fuchs, Gunter Clemens, Doris Von Danwitz, Dorothea Carrera, Marlies Peterson, Bob Gerry.

CREW: World Distribution and Atlas International Present *The Mark of the Devil. Original Story and Screenplay:* Sergio Casstner and Perry Parker. *Director of Photography:* Ernst M. Kalinke. *Assistant Camera Operator:* Fuarhim Gitt, Michael Georg. *Art Director:* Max Mellin. *Decorator:* Walter Karsch. *Costumes:* Barbara Grupp. *Make-up:* Gunther Kulier, Alena Heidankoba. *Film Editor:* Siegrun Jager. *Sound:* Hans-Dieter Schwarz. *Production Manager:* Gerhard Motil. *Production Assistant:* Gerhard Cepe. *Unit Manager:* Heinz Scheloks. *Music:* Michael Holm. *Produced by:* Adrian Hoben. *Directed by:* Michael Armstrong.

SYNOPSIS: In the 15th century, witch-hunters and a mob of angry citizens capture two nuns on the run. The nuns are accused of witchcraft, and then raped. The priest accompanying them is tarred and feathered, and the two nuns are burned alive upon a scaffold.

Later, Lord Witch Finder Cumberland plans to visit town to hunt down more witches. There are so many, apparently, that the local witch-hunters can no longer handle the job adequately. This jurisdictional dispute angers the local witch-finder, the scarred Albino, not only because he does not appreciate having his authority questioned, but because he has conducted no legitimate trials, coerced no valid confessions, and left no documentation of his cruel activities. Accordingly, Albino orders his underlings to forge the appropriate documentation before Cumberland's impending examination.

In the local tavern, Albino makes amorous advances toward Vanessa, a beautiful barmaid. When she refuses his lustful passes, Albino denounces her as a witch. His attempt to try her for witchcraft is prevented by the handsome Baron Christian, an assistant to Cumberland. Albino is whipped for his inappropriate

behavior, and Vanessa and Christian become romantically involved. Albino, however, is not satisfied, and drafts an indictment against Vanessa formally accusing her of witchcraft. Vanessa is arrested and whipped as Lord Cumberland arrives in town, and starts conducting trials.

One local woman, accused of witchcraft, claims that the local bishop raped her. Cumberland does not believe the story, and orders the woman's tongue ripped out. A young noble who owns land the Church wishes to possess is also incarcerated and tortured. Cumberland also finds the indictment against Vanessa to be sufficient. This disturbs Christian, who admits to Cumberland that he feels weakness and uncertainty in this particular case. After affirming his belief in Vanessa's guilt, the witchfinder releases Albino from custody. Almost immediately, Albino accuses Cumberland of impotence, and Cumberland strangles him for his words. Christian witnesses the crime but says nothing at first. However, when Cumberland's judgments become even harsher, Christian starts to doubt that Cumberland still serves God. This suspicion grows when Cumberland detains an innocent family of puppeteers, and tortures them as witches.

Disturbed, Christian challenges Lord Cumberland over his murder of Albino, and the teacher and student hurl angry accusations. Convinced that Lord Cumberland has crossed the line, Christian frees Vanessa. He also intends to free the young baron with the hotly desired land, but Cumberland prevents his escape and captures Christian.

Vanessa fomented an insurrection in town. Cumberland orders all those who stand against him killed, and sides clash. In the melee, the young baron is beheaded. The peasants free Christian, and he pursues Cumberland. Chased and beaten, Cumberland flees the town. Then the villagers turn on Christian, an emissary of the evil Cumberland, and execute him, even as Vanessa runs to his side in tears.

COMMENTARY: Since its release in 1972 (with the rating "V" for "violent"—a brilliant publicity gimmick), *The Mark of the Devil* has developed a cult reputation in some horror movie circles. Yet the film is memorable not so much because of its quality (in fact, it is

terrible...), but because it is an unrepentant, almost gleeful gore-fest. The film opens with the brutal rape of two nuns. It then proceeds to depict dismemberment (a priest's hand is chopped off...), the violent excision of an innocent woman's tongue, torture on the rack, torture on a row of spikes, more rape, more torture, and so forth. Finally, it is plain that the film exists solely to catalogue man's brutality against man.

After the initial rape, hand severing, and torching at the stake, *The Mark of the Devil* pauses momentarily for an on-screen crawl reporting the crushingly obvious information that this period of history was brutal, awful and unjust. Really! Following this brief interruption in the bloody narrative, the film then continues to wallow in the details of those facts. The ugly truth this movie bears witness to is that people enjoy hurting people. That is not a bad point to make (and it has been made well in good films such as *The Crucible* [1996] and *The Devils* [1971]), but by wallowing in the violence (often in close-up), *The Mark of the Devil* inadvertently makes another, far more disturbing (and telling) point.

Specifically, the violence of this movie implies that humans find enjoyment in watching others suffer ... for entertainment, no less. That the film should attempt to appeal to some ethical or moral standard in its opening crawl is rather hypocritical. On one hand, the film wants viewers to be disgusted that human beings can do such things to one another, but on the other hand, it stoops to the level of Cumberland's corrupt witch-finders by depicting the violence with loving detail and attention.

Audiences are invited to feel good about their impulse to view this violence negatively by the moral stirrings of the scripts. "Gee, aren't we above all of this ... aren't we lucky we got out of this terrible time?" the film asks at the same time that it zooms in to capture another atrocity.

No doubt fans of *The Mark of the Devil* would argue that the film is actually anti-violence since it views the witch-finders as amoral, monstrous and impotent men. In response, such apologists are best advised to remember Roger Ebert's oft-quoted thesis on the movies: it is not what a movie's about, it's how it is about it. In other words, *The Mark of the Devil* may indeed have a good point about man's

inhumanity to man, but the way it covers such subject matter is both appalling and exploitative. The film never makes the case for its own morality because the camera spends more time lingering on blood and gore than it does reviling those who conduct the violence.

Contrast this approach with *The Last House on the Left*, Wes Craven's film about violence and retribution. In that picture, intense violence (including rape and disembowelment) was also depicted, but with purpose. The early part of that film spent much time visually comparing and contrasting a so-called civilized family (the Collingwoods) with a not-so-refined one (the vicious Krugs), and it used the technique of cross-cutting to do it. By film's end, the distinctions between families had disappeared, and the Collingwoods resorted to the same level of violence as their enemies. In the famous final shot of the film, accompanied by music which indicated no good had been done ("the castle stays the same..."), Craven established that violence solved nothing.

And *The Mark of the Devil*? It understands that violence is wrong, and that witch-hunters used immoral and unethical means to further their own agendas, but it has no stylistic or artistic comment about its world. The plot is so lazily constructed that the town denizens flit from side to side with no rhyme or reason. When it is necessary to the story, they support Cumberland. When it is necessary to the story, they turn against Cumberland. When it is necessary to feature a tragic ending, the townspeople—having just participated in his rescue—kill Kier's character in cold blood.

It's unclear why the citizens take up arms and fight Cumberland, since the opening scene with the nun defines them as bloodthirsty, and Vanessa incites them to violence with ridiculous ease. It is possible that a statement was trying to be made about the "mob," how it is fickle, how it turns on all sides, eventually. Yet there is no consistency within the picture. In *The Mark of the Devil* people kill others indiscriminately, with no justification or reason, and again the picture seems to say only that people enjoy hurting each other. Worse, that we, as viewers, find enjoyment from watching such violence.

Visually, *The Mark of the Devil* is a mess, depending, like other films

of the time, on the dated and overused technique of the zoom. The camera zooms in so close sometimes that the object it hopes to highlight blurs out of focus. The dubbing of the dialogue is inadvertently ridiculous, and much of the acting is cornball. Keir is a striking, effective performer, but cast in the role of a complete innocent, his character seems merely daft. “Vanessa, do you know that you’re dangerous?” he asks earnestly. “This is my truth—what I can touch and feel,” replies a dreamy Vanessa. Any actor would have difficulty with such naïve-sounding banter, and perhaps that is why it is the dastardly, pompous Lom who remains most memorable. He is a steely-eyed devil in this film, an impotent woman hater. His performance as a powerful hypocrite who says one thing and preaches is another is central to the film, but since he is unlikable, the focus on this character only serves to make the film even less likable, less accessible.

There’s a kernel of an idea in *The Mark of the Devil* that, if developed, could have raised the film’s discourse beyond torture, pain and dismemberment. In Baron Christian’s development to maturity, he comes to reject the faults and learning of his teacher. That rejection of a once-trusted authority, that stirring of independence, is a human emotion that all young people go through. As children become adults, they question what was once accepted quietly, and the results are not always pretty ... yet it is a natural part of maturity. Had *The Mark of the Devil* more narrowly focused on the Christian-Cumberland relationship, son to father, apprentice to mentor, it might have felt more meaningful, and all that violence and brutality would have had a more valuable context.

***Night of the Lepus* (1972) * ***

Critical Reception

“...the producers have come up with the most ludicrous concept in cinema history ... and they are 100 percent serious about it ... rabbits, even when photographed in slow motion close-ups to make them look huge and menacing, will inspire fear in absolutely no one.”—Harry and Michael Medved,

The Golden Turkey Awards, Perigee Books, 1980, pages 66–67.

“Take away the seventies color and gore and this could be an archetypal fifties monster movie. Quite fun, although the enlarged rabbits, shown in slow motion with thunderous hooves on the soundtrack, don’t really carry a genuinely monstrous charge.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 103.

“*Night of the Lepus* ... doesn’t even reasonably try to make a rabbit seem scary ... the film relies almost entirely on slow-motion shots of ordinary rabbits running through miniaturized settings... It is this technical laziness as much as the stupid story or the dumb direction that leaves the film in limbo....”—Roger Greenspun, *New York Times*: “*Night of the Lepus* Shows Peter Rabbit’s Other Side,” October 5, 1972, page 56.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Stuart Whitman (Roy Bennett); Janet Leigh (Gerry Bennett); Rory Calhoun (Cole Hillman); DeForest Kelley (Elgin Clark); Paul Fix (Sheriff Cody); Melanie Fullerton (Amanda Bennett); Chris Morrell (Jackie Hillman); Chuck Hayward (Jud); Henry Wills (Frank); Francesca Jarvis (Mildred); William Elliott (Dr. Leopold); Robert Hardy (Professor Dirkson); Richard Jacome (Deputy Jason); Inez Perez (Housekeeper); G. Leroy Gainther (Walker); Evans Thornton (Major White); I. Stanford Jolley (Dispatcher); Robert Gooden (Leslie); Walter Kelley (Taxi Driver); Frank Kennedy (Doctor); Don Starr (Cutler); Peter O’Crotty (Arlen); Phillip Avenetti (Officer Lopez); Russell Morrell (Priest); Donna Gelgur (Wife in Car); Stephen DeFrance (Husband in Car); Sherry Hummer, Rick Hummer (Children in Car); Jerry

Dunphy (Television Newscaster).

CREW: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Presents *Night of the Lepus*. *Music:* Jimmie Haskell. *Director of Photography:* Ted Voigtlander. *Production Designer:* Stan Jolley. *Film Editor:* John McSweeney. *Set Decorator:* William Calvert. *Sound:* Jerry Jost, Hal Watkins. *Special Effects:* Howard A. Anderson Company. *Unit Production Manager:* John Wilson. *Assistant Director:* Ted Schiltz *Second Unit Director:* Stan Jolley. *Animal Trainer:* Lou Schumacher, Henry Cowl. *Make-up:* Wes Dawn. *Hairdresser:* Alma Johnson. *Wardrobe:* Norman Burza. *Screenplay:* Don Holliday and Gene R. Kearney. *Based upon the novel Year of the Angry Rabbit by:* Russell Braddon. *Produced by:* A. C. Lyles. *Directed by:* William F. Claxton. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 99 minutes.

P.O.V.

“*Night of the Lepus* was made at the time of pictures like *Willard*, *Ben and Frogs* ... it read very well. No one put a gun to my head and said I had to do it. What no one realized was that, no matter what you do, a bunny rabbit is a bunny rabbit. A rat, that can be menacing.... But a bunny rabbit?!”¹⁵.—Janet Leigh, star of *Night of the Lepus* (1972).

SYNOPSIS: Near Ajo, Arizona, rancher Cole Hillman fights a war with a rabbit population explosion. A friend from a nearby university, Elgin Clark, recommends that two scientists, Roy and Gerry Bennett, help Hillman find a solution to the environmental crisis, lest Hillman use deadly poison to stop the infestation. Roy and Gerry agree to help, and soon strike on the notion of manipulating the rabbits with special hormones. Upset about the cruelty of the experiments, Roy and Gerry’s young daughter, Amanda, releases her favorite rabbit after it has been injected with the hormone concoction. The rabbit escapes into the wild, and returns to the general population.

Meanwhile, angry ranchers plan to burn the rabbits out of their holes. Some days later, Gerry and Roy find an abnormally large rabbit footprint on Cole's land. At the same time, Amanda and Cole's son, Jackie, go to play in an old gold mine but find a local, Captain Billy, missing. In the mine, they locate his corpse just as it is devoured by giant rabbits! Terrified, Amanda goes into shock and is taken to the hospital. That night, a herd of killer rabbits murder a trucker who has stopped on the side of the road. The police, led by Sheriff Cody, discover the body and a coroner declares it has been gnawed by something huge ... like a saber-toothed tiger!

Convinced the rabbits are to blame, Elgin, Terry, Roy and Cole search for the mutant strain at the gold mine. They determine that the monsters are hiding inside and plant dynamite charges at all the mine exits. Before killing the rabbits, Roy and Cole venture into the mine to photograph the beasts. A herd of the giant animals attack, and Roy and Cole barely escape as the dynamite is detonated.

Unfortunately, this measure proves ineffective. The oversized rabbits dig themselves free, and attack Cole's ranch. They massacre his horses, and rampage across his land. Out of control, the rabbits break into Cole's house as he and his family hide in the basement. Then, the animals attack Main Street of a nearby town. The next morning, Roy sends Gerry and Amanda to safety in nearby Woodale, while he and Elgin meet with Sheriff Cody and call in the National Guard. When Cole Hillman reports that the rabbits are nearing Ajo, Sheriff Cody evacuates town.

Roy comes up with a plan to trap and stop the rabbits with an electrical fence erected at a nearby railroad junction. Meanwhile, Gerry and Amanda have driven into a sandpit, and are trapped on the side of the road as the rabbits mass for an attack. As authorities plan to destroy the herd, Roy goes to his family's rescue in a helicopter. Gerry uses a flare to hold the rampaging rabbits at bay as they surround her RV. Roy flies in and evacuates his family just in time.

In Ajo, the authorities are warned that thousands of giant rabbits are on the warpath. With Roy's assistance, the electrified fence is charged. The gambit is successful, and the mutant rabbits are destroyed in a spectacular firestorm.

COMMENTARY: *Night of the Lepus*, a film about giant killer rabbits, may be the most ridiculous horror film ever conceived. It wants to be a tale about environmental balance and the necessity of respecting nature, but instead it emerges as a comedy of hilarious proportions as giant rabbits attack a town and a cast of stalwart B players. The poor stars of the film do the best they can mouthing the inane dialogue, but how do you compete with killer rabbits?

“Do not tamper in God’s domain.” That was the message of umpteen giant bug movies in the 1950s, and it is repeated, with minor variation, in the “revenge of nature” films of ’70s. In the fifties, atomic radiation was the bugaboo that had everybody frightened. Twenty years later, it was the notion that man was destroying his environment through pesticides (*Frogs*, *Kingdom of the Spiders*), genetic manipulation (*Night of the Lepus*), pollution (*Empire of the Ants*), and other human errors. Yet the story remains the same: mankind’s irresponsibility and hubris leads him to face undreamed of threats, whether they be giant insects or giant ... rabbits.

Of course, purely as a matter of practicality, insects are a lot more fearsome than are sweet, fuzzy bunnies...

And that, no doubt, is the central flaw of *Night of the Lepus*. Had the rabbits mutated into fanged, disease-ridden, mutated creatures, they might have been scary (*maybe...*). But the giant, oh so cute bunnies of this film only make one long for Easter.

In all seriousness, the film is hampered by primitive special effects that never convince the audience that the bunnies have grown to enormous (and threatening) dimensions. Basically, life-size rabbits mill about randomly on miniature sets in slow motion and hardly seem threatening. Extreme close-ups are frequently used to indicate that these rabbits are gigantic, but that does not work either. These close-shots are inevitably framed against a black, blank background rather than “on set.” So the effect is that the rabbits never seem to be where they are supposed to be.

It is also a stumbling block that there is very rarely any connective material between man and lepus. Only rarely are the actors and the rabbits “composited” in shots together. Instead, it’s a visual mish-

mash, a back and forth between principals and rabbits, and hence there's no sense of menace. Though a paw occasionally "swats" into the frame, it does not seem scary either. In those rare hand-to-hand scuffles between man and beast, the rabbit is clearly a man in a fluffy suit and a rabbit helmet. As one expects, it looks ridiculous...

Furthermore, there appears to have been a shortage of usable rabbit footage. These dazed, sleepy-looking animals are seen in the same sequences of shots, over and over again. The shots of rabbits running under a bridge and leaping across a chasm are seen at least twice. The editing is sloppy too, with bad mismatches between effects and live-action. For instance, one attack features rabbits (in blackest night) supposedly approaching grazing cows (in blue, early evening).

The special effects depiction of "monster" rabbits may have been an impossible hurdle to climb, but *Night of the Lepus* is further plagued by some of the funniest dialogue you'll ever hear in a horror film. The movie opens with a very serious radio broadcast about the rabbit population explosion. "Rabbits ... which seem so cuddly ... can become a menace," the grave-sounding announcer declares. It might have been a good idea *not* to start the film with the idea that its main antagonist was considered "cuddly."

Later, the film awkwardly tries to explain the concepts surrounding "hormones." Little Amanda consequently asks her mother (Leigh), "Mommy, what's a control group?"

Yet the funniest dialogue is reserved for the action sequences. "Attention!" shouts a harried police officer to a crowd at a drive-in movie, "there's a herd of killer rabbits headed this way!"

Another funny moment, during a surprise attack, has one character warn another "Behind you!!!" as a giant rabbit stealthily approaches.

This author's favorite moment occurs when a sincere Leigh, trying to calm a survivor of a vicious bunny attack, soothingly declares that it is all right, that "the rabbit's gone..."

It's all such a mismatch. The funny monsters and the lousy special

effects play off the earnest actors to generate a really amusing picture.

DeForest Kelley, Stuart Whitman, Janet Leigh, Paul Fix and Rory Calhoun deserve better material than they find in *Night of the Lepus*, and one has to admire them all for so ably keeping straight faces as they heroically stand against the onslaught of the bunnies.

LEGACY: In 1999, footage from *Night of the Lepus* showed up in the mega-hit *The Matrix*, starring Keanu Reeves. Watch the TV screen as Keanu (as Neo) arrives at the home of the Oracle. Behind him on the tube is footage of rampaging rabbits in slow-motion.

Nothing but the Night

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Inspector Bingham); Peter Cushing (Sir Ashley); Diana Dors (Anna Harb); Georgia Brown (Joan Foster); Keith Barron (Dr. Haynes).

CREW: *Directed by:* Peter Sasdy. *Produced by:* Anthony Nelson Keys. *Screenplay by:* John Blackburn. *Director of Photography:* Kenneth Talbot. *Music:* Malcolm Williamson. *Film Editor:* Keith Palmer. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

DETAILS: A terrible bus accident may be linked to a series of murders once thought suicides, and detective Bingham (Lee) is on the case. The investigation takes him to a strange Scottish orphanage in this unusual supernatural thriller.

The Other (1972) * * *

Critical Reception

“...it confronts us with the same problems of identity, of something lurking beneath the surface,

of the supernatural and evil that Edmund Wilson explored so brilliantly in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*.... As a psychological thriller, *The Other* is a good film that might have been great.”—Hugh James, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIII, Number 7, August-September 1972, page 432.

“Like erotica, horror thrives on suggestion, an approach hopelessly at odds with a period in films in which audiences are calling for increasingly explicit celebrations of violence. It is to Mulligan's credit, then, that he treats his spooky story in the ambiguous style of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, constantly keeping us wondering whether Holland, the bad brother is or isn't a projection of his twin's fevered brain ... but his Cain and Abel story with its constantly changing sets of clues, conveys neither surprise nor horror, only the heavy machinery of essentially 19th century Gothic fiction.”—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: “Which Twin?” June 5, 1972, page 98.

“I was never quite sure which twin was the bad one and therefore whether the evil was psychological or supernatural. I did not much care either. Though director Robert Mulligan has handled the children well and achieved a fine feel for the “not so long ago” period setting and atmosphere, the story ... does not generate enough sense or substance to balance its shock value gimmicks.”—Moirá Walsh, *America*, June 17, 1972, page 635.

“Visually effective, the chilling *The Other* gave fans some memorable goosebumps.”—Frank Manchel, *An Album of Modern Horror Films*, Franklin Watts, Publisher, 1983, page 42.

“...the more the audience was prepared to work with it, the more frightening it became in its implications....”—William K. Everson, *Classics of the Horror Film*, A Citadel Press Book, 1974, page

Cast & Crew

CAST: Uta Hagen (Ada); Diana Muldaur (Alexandra); Chris Udvarnoky (Niles Perry); Martin Udvarnoky (Holland Perry); Norma Connolly (Aunt Vee); Lou Frizzell (Uncle George); Loretta Leversee (Winnie); Jenny Sullivan (Torrie); Victor French (Mr. Angelini); Portia Nelson (Mrs. Rowe); Jack Collins (Mr. P.C. Pretty); Ed Bakey (Chan-Yu); John Ritter (Rider); Clarence Crow (Russell).

CREW: 20th Century–Fox Presents a Robert Mulligan Production, *The Other*. *Assistant Directors:* Dan Kranze, Mark Sandrich, Bert Gold. *Sound:* Jack Solomon, Don Bassman. *Set Decorator:* Ruby Levitt. *Costumes:* Tommy Welsh, Joanne Haas. *Make-up:* Joe DiBella. *Hairstylist:* Dorothy White. *Orchestration:* Arthur Morton. *Color:* DeLuxe. *Production Designed by:* Albert Brenner. *Film Editor:* Folmar Blangsted, O. Nicholas Brown. *Director of Photography:* Robert L. Surtees. *Associate Producer:* Don Kranze. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Executive Producer:* Thomas Tryon. *Screenplay:* Thomas Tryon. *Based on the novel by:* Thomas Tryon. *Produced and Directed by:* Robert Mulligan. Produced by REM-Benchmark Productions. Released by 20th Century–Fox Film Corp. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 100 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In rural Midwest America in the 1930s, little Niles Perry raises hell with his twin brother, Holland. Their mother seems oddly disconnected from reality, apparently in mourning over a death in the family. On one afternoon, the boys' Russian grandmother, Ada, teaches Niles how to use his special gift of insight to get in psychic touch with other organisms, like a crow. In his mind, Niles imagines himself flying like the crow. In that state, he sees a child friend impaled on a pitchfork in a haystack and his twin, Holland, running guiltily from the scene of the crime. At other

points, Niles plays the psychic “game” to determine how a magician at a local fair accomplishes a disappearing act.

Meanwhile, Niles keeps his dead father’s severed finger, complete with ring, in a tin of special items. One day, Holland dresses as a magician, and scares an elderly neighbor to death by pulling a rat out of his hat in her living room. When Ada visits old Mrs. Rowe with Niles, they find her dead.

Niles’ mother soon finds the severed finger and demands to know where Niles got it. Holland intervenes and Mrs. Perry falls down a flight of stairs. She is now paralyzed, and Niles is horrified. He flees to the church, where he admits to Ada that Holland terrifies him. Niles tells Ada that Holland killed Mrs. Rowe by accident. Angry, she leads Niles out to the graveyard, where she forces him to see Holland’s tombstone. It seems that the twin, Holland, died on his birthday when he fell into a well. Niles is flabbergasted by the revelation, but appears to accept the death of his brother.

That night, Niles is visited by the dead Holland, who leads him to a coffin and tells him to “remember.” There, Niles views Holland’s corpse. That very night, Ada overhears Niles talking to Holland again, even though she warned him not to continue playing this particular game.

While Niles cares for his older sister’s newborn one night, the baby disappears from its cradle ... replaced by a ceramic doll, just as in Niles’ favorite story, *The Changeling*. Authorities arrive to search for the baby, but Niles is convinced Holland has stolen it. He tells Ada his story, blaming everything, including the death of his father, on Holland. The baby is soon found drowned and discolored in a barrel of wine.

Realizing that it is Niles, not Holland, who is a murderer, Ada locks herself and Niles in a barn, and starts a fire that will kill them both. Niles manages to escape his grandmother’s trap, and lives on, his evil unsuspected.

COMMENTARY: *The Other* is a slow-moving, but often atmospheric horror film. It is gloomy, dread-filled, and, frankly, rather confusing. The movie never clarifies whether Niles is merely

schizophrenic or actually being haunted by his malevolent, dead brother. The film lacks outright scares (as well as a linear story line), yet is remarkably effective in creating a sense of mood and place. It is also buttressed by the film's allusions to *The Changeling*, a fairy tale that has thematic meaning and that places this story of insanity and childhood into perspective.

Robert Mulligan has a flair for landing viewers in another world, a different time and place. Accordingly, the film is exquisitely photographed, a lush evocation of the 1930s. The details feel just right, and there is a lyrical nostalgia in the set design, the art direction, and the costuming. Period horror films are notoriously hard to pull off, yet Mulligan has taken pains to re-create a world of bygone days. Skies are blue, the landscape is gorgeous, and a simpler era is recreated in terms that stand in stark contrast to the horror to come.

Rewardingly, Mulligan also has a keen eye for creepy images and touches, if not outright jolts or scares. These disturbing images are many, and they linger in the mind long after the film is done. Niles imagines a baby in a jar; his mother is permanently disassociated from reality, in a glaze. A boy unwraps a package and inside is a severed finger; a rat's neck is snapped before our eyes. A gloved white hand unexpectedly enters the frame; the freak show features a hairy boy, a deformed man, and an obese woman, and one feels Niles would be right at home with them. And so on. This is not so much an out-and-out scary picture as it is a disturbing one. The sight of a baby drowned in a barrel of wine is the final, unsettling horror, and it too is a kicker. The corpse has become a sick violet, as the skin has soaked up the wine. A grim, sick, image.

The children, Chris and Martin Udvarnoky, are very good in the film, and one is reminded again just how disturbing "scary" children can be. The notion that a little bottle of innocence could actually be evil, a harbinger of death, is a potent one in the genre, exploited in everything from *Village of the Damned* (1960) to *The Exorcist* (1973). This film adds to the "evil child" equation by making prominent mention of the story of the changeling, a terrible creature that replaces the soul of a baby. This story is one of Niles' favorites, and is obviously a metaphor for his character. Is he

simply a child, or is he a creature of evil?

Likewise, Niles' final act in the film is to "steal" a baby, replacing it with a doll, acting again like in *The Changeling*. The changeling allusion works rather nicely, giving the film a literary feel, yet one still feels there could be additional clarity. The film goes out of its way *not* to make a decision about Niles. He could be crazy, and a monster, or just a little boy besieged by tragedy. Still, the film works despite the cloudy narrative. What Niles actually "is" may be less important than where he is (the depiction of his world), and what he represents (a changeling).

The Possession of Joel Delaney (1972) * ½

Critical Reception

"Whatever sinister quality the picture has stems from the ambience of Puerto Rican Harlem and not from the direction of Waris Hussein or the acting of Miss MacLaine.... Although Hussein has learned some of the tricks of suspense from Hitchcock, most of the time we're treated to nonsense...."—*Films in Review*, Volume XXIII, Number 3, June-July 1972, pages 375–376.

"I presume that Miss MacLaine was attracted to the story because its sardonic examination of contrasting life styles seemed to her a forceful indictment of white racism. But she missed the point that its unflattering depiction of Puerto Ricans could have the opposite effect. Director Waris Hussein has a blind spot too. He can't tell the difference between frightening an audience and disgusting them."—Moir Walsh, *America*, June 17, 1972, page 635.

"...works its way towards its sickening climax with such predictability that only a newborn baby would have trouble guessing whose head will be severed next."—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: "Terror

Tonic,” June 12, 1972, page 98.

“...so nauseating and downbeat, its climax so pointlessly revolting, that it was not worth the effort of working with it.”—William K. Everson, *Classics of the Horror Film*, a Citadel Press book, 1974, page 242.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Shirley MacLaine (Norah Benson); Perry King (Joel Delaney); David Elliott (Peter Benson); Lisa Kohane (Carrie Benson); Lovelady Powell (Erika); Barbara Trentham (Sherry); Miriam Colon (Veronica); Edmundo Rivera Alvarez (Don Pedro); Teodorina Bellow (Mrs. Perez); Robert Burr (Ted Benson); Ernesto Gonzalez (Young Man at Séance); Peter Turgeon (Detective Brady); Earl Hyman (Charles); Marita Lindholm (Marta Benson); Paulita Iglesias (Brujo at Service); Stan Watt (James); Michael Hordern (Justin); William Hawley, Aukie Herger.

CREW: Paramount Pictures and ITC Present *The Possession of Joel Delaney*. *Director of Photography:* Arthur J. Ornitz. *Production Designer:* Peter Murton. *Film Editor:* John Victor Smith. *In Charge of Post-Production:* George Justin. *Art Director:* Philip Rosenberg. *Costumes:* Frank Thompson. *Casting:* Jennifer Levy. *Extras Casting:* Vic Ramos. *Set Decorator:* Edward Stewart. *Wardrobe:* Marilyn Putnam. *Make-up:* Saul Meth. *Hair-stylist:* Lee Trent. *Assistant Director:* Alan Hopkins, Alex Hapsas, Mike Haley. *Camera Operator:* Lou Barlia. *Script Supervisor:* Robert Hodes. *Sound:* Dick Gramalia. *Dubbing Editor:* Dino DiCampo. *Sound Mixer:* Gerry Humphreys. *Music Composed and Directed by:* Joe Raposo. *Screenplay:* Matt Robinson, Grimes Grice. *Based on a novel by:* Ramona Stewart. *Directed by:* Waris Hussein. Filmed entirely on location in New

York. Post-Production at Twickenham Studios,
England. *M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time:* 102
minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Norah Benson, a rich New York City socialite, is disturbed when her younger brother, Joel Delaney, begins to act strangely. She checks up on him, visiting his apartment, and finds that the police have beaten her to the building. The police drag Joel away, and put him in Bellevue hospital. Norah searches Joe's apartment for some clue to his odd behavior. She finds a switchblade, and then goes to see Joel at Bellevue. There, she learns Joel is incarcerated for an attack on his landlord, Mr. Perez. So that he will be released from Bellevue, Joel admits to taking drugs, but he must see a psychologist, family friend Dr. Larens.

Joel's odd behavior grows worse, and he becomes cruel. He questions Norah about her sex life, frequents bar, and makes love to his girlfriend in violent fashion. When Norah sees Joe next, at his birthday party, Joel is even weirder. Suddenly, he speaks Spanish fluently, and nearly burns his girlfriend's hair in his birthday cake. When Norah checks up on her the next morning, she finds her in bed, decapitated. The police arrest Joel.

The police promptly question Norah about her brother. His girlfriend's death is identical to three murders in Spanish Harlem that took place a summer ago. Confused, Norah visits Spanish Harlem after researching the late Tonio Perez, the suspected murderer. Norah's domestic, Veronica, suggests Norah check out a shop in Spanish Harlem where there may be help for Joel. There, Norah meets Don Pedro. He reveals that Joel has been possessed by Tonio's spirit! Norah is reluctant to believe this, but Pedro arranges a séance to draw out Perez's restless soul. The ritual appears successful, and Norah is relieved.

But Joel is not better. Instead, he goes into a psychotic frenzy! Norah seeks help from the therapist, who instructs Nora to take her children and get out of town. Norah follows the advice, and stays at a remote beach house.

After a quiet night, terror strikes. Dr. Laren's severed head is found in the beach house refrigerator, and Joel arrives. He threatens the

children, demands they take their clothes off, and then dances with them. The police arrive outside the beach house, but inside things get worse. Joel makes Norah eat dog food out of a bowl on the floor. When Norah fights back, Joel attempts to rape her. Norah's children escape, and the cops shoot Joel. He dies on the shore, but, once and for all, is himself again

Suddenly, Norah is possessed...

COMMENTARY: In *The Possession of Joel Delaney*, a rich white boy is struck by the horror movie equivalent of white liberal guilt, and possessed by the spirit of a murderous Hispanic. Though the plot has possibilities, the filmmakers exploit audience prejudices to heighten suspense. Worse, the film features a really cheap ending that soaks up the last ounce of the viewer's good will.

In the early part of the film it is clear that Joel is grappling with his identity. He feels guilty that his family is so rich, and thus moves to a poor district in the city to be with what he calls "the real people." That impulse to try to understand those less fortunate than himself turns out to be Joel's undoing, since it is his proximity to a local, an ethnic American, that ends up causing his possession. There's an unpleasant message here, to be sure. When you leave your own "kind," you face the possibility of losing your true nature, of being overcome by the spirit of the poor. It's not only anti-tolerant, it is anti-American, to suggest that Joel's better impulses, to question his wealth and superiority in a class society, is the cause of his ultimate downfall. Implicitly, the movie warns that people should stay within their own social circles, with those of the same skin color and religion. If not, those "voodoo" ways might get ya!

The film goes further downhill by taking Norah (MacLaine) to the poorest streets in Spanish Harlem, where she looks and feels threatened among Puerto Ricans. The location shooting, the scads of authentic "Hispanic" extras, and MacLaine's fear all add up to an exploitation scene of the ugliest order. It reveals the white man's fear of ethnic minorities in America, in a manner that is neither pleasant nor nice. The audience is supposed to identify with MacLaine because she is so "obviously" in danger, surrounded by other than her own people. That MacLaine's very presence with non-whites should seem scary presumes that audiences share the

character's (and filmmaker's) biases. In essence, the movie resorts to racist fear to generate scares and suspense, and that is simply not playing fair. It is an unsavory way to try to inject life into a very lifeless film.

But the worst is yet to come. Just when you think the movie cannot sink any lower, or be any more offensive, it ends with a nasty "hostage" situation in which a little boy is forced to undress and then dance naked before Hussein's camera. It is a meanspirited, sick move (replete with frontal nudity...), and it is wholly unnecessary. It gives the movie no additional power, making it only more repellant. Why abuse a child actor in this fashion? Why humiliate him? Is there any dramatic reason for it?

Finally, the last moment of the film reveals that Norah—ostensibly our heroine—has been possessed by the "evil" Puerto Rican. This is the kind of lame-brained ending that causes audiences to hurl objects at the screen. A tragic ending, built up to, can be a very powerful thing. *The Wicker Man* and *The Blair Witch Project* are just two horror films which earn their downbeat endings, being terrifying and clever throughout. The ending of *The Possession of Joel Delaney* is just another trick, another gimmick thrown out for lack of genuine invention. The climax doesn't inform; it doesn't chill. It merely infuriates. One suspects that a lot of money went into the production of *The Possession of Joel Delaney*. That money might have been spent on a better script.

***Return of Count Yorga* (1972) * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Robert Quarry (Count Yorga); Mariette Hartley (Cynthia Nelson); Roger Perry (David Baldwin), Philip Frame (Tommy); Craig Nelson (Sgt. O'Connor); Yvonne Wilder, Tom Toner, Rudy De Luca, George MacReady, Walter Brooke, Edward Walsh, David Lampson, Karen Houston, Helen Baron, Jesse Wells, Mike Pataki, Corrine Conley, Alden Joseph, Peg Shirley, Liz Rogers, Paul Hansen.

CREW: A Michael MacReady & Bob Kelljan Production. *Production Manager:* Carl Olsen. *Chief Electrician:* Dennis Bishop. *Script Supervisor:* Joyce King. *Wardrobe:* Jeannie Anderson. *Make-up:* Mark Busson. *Sound Mixer:* Rod Sutton. *Property Master:* Eric Nelson. *Set Designer:* Vince Cresseman. *Special Effects:* Roger George. *Assistant Director:* Jack Oliver. *Animal Trainer:* Vee Kasegan. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Services. *Sound Effects:* Edit International Ltd. *Optical Effects:* Modern Film Effects. *Film Editors:* Fabien Tordjmann, Laurette Odney. *Director of Photography:* Bill Butler. *Songs:* “*Think It Over,*” written and performed by: Marilyn Lovell; “*This Song,*” written by: Marilyn Lovell, Yvonne Wilder, Bob Kelljan, Bill Marx. *Music composed and conducted by:* Bill Marx. *Screenplay by:* Bob Kelljan, Yvonne Wilder. *Produced by:* Michael MacReady. *Directed by:* Bob Kelljan. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 97 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: As night falls in rural California, a young orphan, Tommy, inadvertently rouses the dead in a nearby graveyard ... and is turned into a vampire by the master of the night, Count Yorga. Then, at the Westwood Orphanage, beautiful instructor Cynthia Nelson meets Yorga on Halloween night as she attends a masquerade ball. Before long, one of the partygoers, Mitzi, turns up with strange bite marks on her neck. Claiming to be European royalty, Yorga suggests it is time to believe in vampires.

That night, Cynthia has trouble sleeping, and awakens feeling disturbed. Ironically, her entire family feels the same way, citing a sense of uneasiness. Suddenly, Yorga’s undead brides attack the house. An unconscious Cynthia is taken to Yorga’s castle after her family is killed in the attack. There, Yorga hypnotizes her into forgetting the incident, and believing that he is her friend. He informs her that she must rest at his home for a few days.

Meanwhile, a deaf orphan finds Tommy in the aftermath of the massacre and authorities are notified. When they arrive, however, all signs of the attack have been cleaned up. Tommy, a servant of

Yorga, lies about the incident. Brudeh, Yorga's manservant, dumps the bodies in quicksand on the count's property.

In San Francisco, Cynthia's boyfriend, David Baldwin, suspects vampire activity on Yorga's part, and seeks the help of an expert in the occult. Meanwhile, back at Gateway Mansion, Yorga believes he can experience love with Cynthia, although a soothsayer warns him not to even try. By night, Yorga hunts the ill Mitzi and her boyfriend. Craving blood, he follows them to their houseboat, and drains Mitzi dry.

That very night, Tommy lures another victim to the mansion, even as Yorga informs Cynthia of his love for her. As she rejects him, David, the Reverend Thomas and two police detectives head to Yorga's castle to investigate him. While David and the cops (Madden and O'Connor) search the house, the reverend attempts to distract Yorga. The count sees through the ruse, and lures the reverend to a pit of quicksand ... where the man of the cloth drowns.

Inside the castle, Yorga's vampires attack David and the cops. The forces of good are separated, and O'Connor and Madden are done in by Yorga's vampire minions. David and Cynthia attempt to escape the house, but Yorga captures Cynthia, and attempts to run off, with David in close pursuit. Cynthia finally remembers that Yorga is responsible for the death of her family, and plants an axe in the vampire's chest. David pushes the vampire over the ledge of a bell tower ... presumably to his death. Cynthia is relieved, until she realizes that David has been bitten, and is now a vampire himself.

COMMENTARY: The second time is the charm for *The Return of Count Yorga*, a fun sequel to the 1970 cult-horror hit. Not only is this sequel scarier than its predecessor, but it possesses an admirable (but not distracting) sense of humor. Buoyed also by Robert Quarry's central performance, this is a vampire film that delivers the goods.

Return of Count Yorga opens with a sense of anticipation and danger. A young boy, Tommy, plays ball all alone on the grounds of Yorga's expansive estate as night falls, and a high angle shot reveals that he is in real danger from an unseen terror. From there,

referencing *Night of the Living Dead*, the dead walk, and an ill wind (the “winds of Santa Ana”) blow across a seemingly sedate orphanage. These moments of fear—the resurrected corpses, the attack on the boy and the promise of more horrors to come (carried on the wind)—all lend the film a quality that *Count Yorga, Vampire*, truly lacked: a sense of atmosphere. The first film, burdened by a clunky opening narration seemed almost amateurish at times, but this sequel rectifies any mistakes from the franchise’s past, reveling in a gothic atmosphere. Even the characters take note of this new focus on texture. “Night winds do stir the imagination,” Yorga acknowledges. Perhaps that’s an admission on the part of the producers that they have learned some new tricks since creating the initial film.

The zombie attack on Cynthia’s house is also well staged, and frightening. There is a shocking “jolt” moment after a long interval of silence, and much use of lenses that distort the frame. And, the director also understands well how slow-motion photography can effectively sell the terror. Even the common touches of “taunting laughter” and “mysterious whispers” from dark corners feel fresh in this film, which reveals energy not hinted at in the original film.

Yet despite all these improvements, *Return of Count Yorga* remembers it has a history—in a way. During a beautifully composed sequence overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, director Kelljan stages a scenic “walk/talk” scene, much like one in *Count Yorga, Vampire*. In both films, the director adopts a distant stance (in long shot), and actors “loop” their dialogue over authentic local footage. This is a stylistic bridge between films. Even though the location has changed, the subject (vampires in a modern world) remains the same.

In another nice touch, Roger Perry has been invited back to duel with Yorga in this sequel, though he plays a different (and less interesting) character this time around.

Humor also flourishes in this vampire sequel. When David seeks help from a professor in the occult, he is disturbed to find the old man is hard-of-hearing, and unable to assist. He mistakes the name “Yorga” for “Yoga.” This scene is not only amusing, but it helps to set up the climax, revealing that, essentially, David will have no

help in defeating the vampire master. In another wicked moment, Yorga sits down in front of a TV screen and watches an Ingrid Pitt vampire movie on TV, straight from the vaults of Hammer Studios! Also, any true horror aficionado will love one of the film's absurd, but fun moments. Near the climax, an off-screen Yorga makes a threatening—yet funny—overhead announcement to his nemesis. “David Baldwin ... this is Count Yorga ... you're going to die...,” the vampire informs Baldwin, in a ridiculous moment. First of all, the threat comes off like an important announcement on a high school PA system. And secondly, why does Yorga bother to introduce himself before issuing his threat? Does he think his nemesis has forgotten his name? It is an absurd, silly moment ... and totally wonderful in a million ways.

Quarry seems quite energized in this film, adding a tragic quality to Yorga's character. He says he believes in a “cold, emotional truth,” yet is blind-sided by Cynthia, and disarmed by feelings of love. This is an interesting twist on so cool a character, and one quite unexpected. The image heretofore of Yorga was one of hedonistic delight. He was a slick, seedy vampire with a taste for the ladies ... literally. This film gives Quarry some more substantial emotions to sink his teeth into. And, in the kill scenes, Quarry is still commendably icy. Near the end of the picture, his cool dismissal of the reverend—leading him to quicksand and watching him sink to his demise—establishes the real danger of this creature of the night.

If *Return of Count Yorga* fails in any category, it is that the climax of the film degenerates into a repeat of the first film's denouement: a search through the castle by those who suspect Yorga's identity as a vampire. And, sadly, the characters populating this world are still not very smart. Early in the film, Yorga (dressed in stylish vampire cape) enters a masquerade party, and informs his fellow partygoers that he believes in vampires. Moments later, a girl is found unconscious with two bites on her neck, and nobody suspects there might be a connection between Yorga and a vampire attack! If that moment had been played with the tongue-in-cheek delight of Yorga's threatening, yet strangely matter-of-fact announcement to David, the picture might have worked even better.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Chris Robinson (Tim); Alex Rocco (Thomkins); Steve Alaimo (Crail); Susan Carroll (Susie); Mark Harris (Bob); Rey Baumel (Sidney); Paul Avery (Psycho); Marcie Knight (Gloria); Gary Crutcher (Dr. Everett); Mei Pape (Guard); Butterball Smith (Stage Manager); Pamela Talus (Girlfriend); Bill Marquez (Wachula).

CREW: *Film Editor:* Julio Chavez. *Director of Photography:* Cliff Poland. *Assistant Director:* Gayle DeCamp. *Director of Sound:* Howard Warren. *Camera Technician:* Mike Davis. *Property Master:* Jack Johnson. *Make-up:* Marie Del Russo. *Animal Sequences Filmed at:* Homasassa Spring, Florida. *Color:* Capital Labs and Deluxe. *Titles:* Visual Productions. *Sound:* Warren Sound Systems & McLeod Films); Filmed in Everglades and Ivan Tors Studio, Miami Florida. *Written by:* Gary Crutcher. *Executive Producer:* John H. Burrow. *From an original story by:* William Grefe. *Songs “Sparrow” and “Star a New World” written and sung by:* Jack Vino. *Produced by:* Steve Alaimo, Bobby Radeloff. *Musical Score:* Post Production Associates. *Produced and Directed by:* William Grefe. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 92 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Tim is a Native-American, Vietnam veteran whose father was shot while trespassing on the land of a local robber baron, Thomkins. Understandably, Tim is not happy with his lot in the world, and has forsaken his village to care for snakes. He now lives isolated from mankind in the Florida everglades, but takes special care of a family of snakes. In fact, snake parents Stanley and Hazel have just mated, and little baby snakes are on the way.

One day, Thomkins travels out to Tim's place to make him an offer. He will buy Tim's snakes, kill them, and then sell their skins on the lucrative fashion market. Tim is none too happy with the idea of this exploitation, and has been using the snakes for a positive goal

instead: providing venom samples for the local hospital. Thomkins and his half-wit enforcer, Crail, warn Tim that he will do as they say or else. In revenge, Tim attacks Thomkins' snake-collecting operation, freeing the exploited snakes before they can be killed. At the same time that Tim proves to be a thorn in his side, Thomkins is bedeviled by his 17-year-old daughter, Susie. She has become sexually active with many of the locals, and downright rebellious. Susie tells Thomkins that she hates him, and Thomkins warns her to watch her step. He then hires Marty "Psycho" Simpson to keep Tim at bay and if need be, kill him.

Before long, Tim has struck again. He leads Crail and another henchman, Bob, to a quicksand pit ... where Stanley the snake promptly bites them. The poisoned men sink into the quicksand and die. An irate Psycho seeks vengeance, and kills Hazel and Stanley's snake brood. This murder drives Tim over the edge of sanity, and he and Stanley kill Psycho.

Tim is further enraged when a local stripper, Gloria, and her husband abuse snakes on-stage as part of her cabaret act. In one vicious moment, Gloria (dressed as Cleopatra) bites the head off a live snake. By night, Tim rights this wrong, and Stanley and his fellow snakes kill the offenders.

The next day, Tim takes the fight directly to Thomkins. He dumps snakes in the pool, and Thomkins dives in for his morning swim, unaware of the danger. He dies quickly, leaving Tim to kidnap the beautiful Susie. He takes her back to the Everglades, and asks her to be Eve to his Adam. Once at Tim's place, Susie and Tim make love, but the party does not last. Susie accuses Tim of playing god with his snakes. She decides to leave, and Tim orders Stanley to kill her. When Stanley will no longer be used, Tim is infuriated, and grows violent. Defending himself, Stanley bites his master ... multiple times. A lamp falls off a table inside the cabin and starts a fire. Susie and the snakes escape, but the hate-filled Tim dies. He asks Stanley, his old friend, if in Hell he will finally learn to accept who he is...

COMMENTARY: "The lowest thing on this Earth are snakes," says a character in *Stanley*, a low-budget variation of *Willard* (1971) and *Ben* (1972). Oddly, the movie itself seems to suggest otherwise,

depicting a world of unsavory men and women, where people hurt people. Stanley the snake is actually one of the nicer characters in a movie that makes viewers realize just how good a film *Willard* really is.

Calling *Stanley a Willard* with snakes is pretty accurate. There's the one word title (which happens to be the name of an animal, as in *Ben*), and a story of a disenfranchised man training animals to kill his enemies. In this situation, Thomkins the snake killer is like the Ernest Borgnine character in *Willard*, and Chris Robinson's Tim is the equivalent of the much-abused Willard Stiles (Bruce Davison). Stanley, like Ben before him, comes to realize that his master is no better than his enemies and ultimately turns on the man he once protected. It couldn't be much more on the nose.

What truly differentiates *Stanley* from *Willard* is that the snake variation is done without a modicum of wit, style, or even meaningful subtext. Where *Willard* had a compelling character in Stiles (and even in Sondra Locke as his love interest), *Stanley* goes out of its way to present really unattractive people. Thomkins makes incestuous advances toward his 17-year-old daughter, Susie. Susie is depicted as a cruel nymphomaniac (the best kind!). The strip club is a hellhole filled with fatty, unattractive strippers and hiccupping drunks. One over-the-hill stripper, who Tim visits backstage, has baggy-looking underwear hanging from her clothesline ... a not very appealing image. Taken as a whole, it's like a lingering ride down a sewer, with even Tim emerging as an unlikable psycho, damaged perhaps by his experiences in Vietnam. And the only subtext comes in when Tim demands that Susie "touch" his snake, an obvious penis metaphor. "Touch him!" he orders, and one cannot help but think of Mike Myers' character Dieter, who demanded that guests on his TV show (Sprockets) touch his monkey. Susie's response to this invitation is equally charged with sexuality. "It's my first time," she purrs. Yeah, right.

Like *Night of the Lepus*, *Ben*, *Frogs*, *Kingdom of the Spiders*, or any other "revenge of the animals"-themed pictures of the 1970s, *Stanley* wears its environmental heart on its sleeve. Thomkins is bad because he exploits snakes for profit. Tim, like the snakes, feels exploited by white American society, and so he becomes riddled

with a “cancer of hate.” It’s all meant to be meaningful, but the film is not sincere in its assertions. For instance, Tim does not want any animals hurt, yet he feeds live mice to the snakes. Isn’t there a contradiction worthy of note there? How does he rationalize the death of some animals, but not others?

The hazy metaphor that Indians, like snakes, are exploited does not really work either. When Tim says that maybe in Hell he will find out who he is, it’s as if the film is blaming his American Indian heritage and genetic make-up for his character failings. Or maybe Vietnam is an excuse. The film doesn’t really decide, except that Tim becomes “evil.” He sees himself as Adam, Susie as Eve ... and Stanley, the serpent, represents the Devil? That metaphor does not really fit, since it is Adam (Tim) who destroys the paradise of Eden, by turning on his friend, Stanley, and on his “would-be bride,” Susie. There’s all this classical allusion but it means nothing in relation to what actually occurs in the picture.

Snakes and people do interact in the same shots in this film, a fact that at least lends *Stanley* a believability missing from *Frogs* (wherein Ray Milland and the frogs were never seen in the same shot...). At one point Tim drops a bag of snakes on the camera, and snakes fall towards the lens. That’s pretty cool. Then, in a series of dissolves, the snakes land on a stripper and her husband as they writhe in bed. It’s a bizarre moment in a bizarre movie, and probably one that doesn’t bear too much scrutiny.

“Your idea of a dream is my idea of a nightmare,” Susie says of her incestuous father in *Stanley*. She might have added that this movie is the viewer’s idea of a nightmare too.

LEGACY: Chris Robinson went onto play a popular character on the ABC daytime soap opera *General Hospital* for many years, but never again acted with snakes.

Superbeast

Cast & Crew

CAST: Antoinette Bower (Dr. Pardee); Craig Littler

(Dr. Fleming); Harry Lauter (Stewart Victor); Vic Diaz (Diaz); Jose Romulo (Vigo).

CREW: *Written, Produced, and Directed by:* George Schenck. *Director of Photography:* Nonong Rasca. *Film Editor:* Tony DiMarch. *Music:* Richard LaSalle. United Artists. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: Shot in the Philippines (by *Daughter of Satan's* cinematographer, Nanong Rosca), *Superbeast* is an odd hybrid of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Most Dangerous Game*. Here, a big game hunter (Lauter) tracks down and kills criminals who have been transformed into monsters courtesy of a scientist's (Littler's) "rehabilitation" formula. Bower plays the pathologist who runs afoul of the goings-on deep in a lush forest.

Tales from the Crypt (1972) * * ½

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joan Collins (Joanne); Peter Cushing (Grimsdyke); Roy Dotrice (Gregory); Richard Greene (Jason); Ian Hendry (Maitland); Patrick Magee (Carter); Barbara Murray (Wife); Nigel Patrick (Rogers); Robin Phillips (Elliot); Ralph Richardson (Crypt Keeper); Geoffrey Bayldon (Guide); David Markham (Father); Robert Hatton (Neighbor); Angie Grant (Susan); Susan Denny (Wife); Chloe Franks (Daughter); Martin Boddey (Husband); Oliver MacGreevy (Maniac); With: Manning Wilson, Kay Adrian, Carlos Baker, Dan Gaalfield, Melinda Clancy, Paul Glere, Sharon Glere, Clifford Earl, Edward Evans, Frank Forsyth, Peter Frazer, Irene Gawre, George Herbert, Harry Locke, Stafford Niedhurst, Jayne Soffano, Peter Thomas, Tony Wall, Hodger Wallace.

CREW: Metromedia Producers Corporation
Presents an Amicus Production, *Tales from the*

Crypt. Screenplay by: Milton Subotsky. Based on stories by: Al Feldstein, Johnny Craig and Bill Gaines originally published in the Comic Magazines Tales from the Crypt and The Vault of Horror by Bill Gaines. Music composed and conducted by: Douglas Gamley. Director of Photography: Norman Warwick. Art Director: Tony Curtis. Editor: Teddy Darras. Production Manager: Teresa Bolland. Production Supervisor: Arthur Stolnitz. Assistant Director: Peter Saunders. Camera Operator: John Harris. Continuity: Penny Daniels. Casting Director: Ronnie Curtis. Make-up: Roy Ashton. Chief Hairdresser: Joan Carpenter. Wardrobe Mistress: Bridget Sellers. Sound Mixer: Norman Bolland. Sound Editor: Pat Foster. Dubbing Mixer: Nolan Roberts. Set Dresser: Helen Thomas. Production Executive: Paul Thompson. Produced by: Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. Executive Producers: Charles Fries. Directed by: Freddie Francis. Produced at Shepperton Studios, Middlesex, England. M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 92 minutes.

P.O.V.

“We had Ralph Richardson for two days and things were going slightly awry because the script was much too short. We made it up as we went along, and dear old Ralph didn’t mind ... he was quite happy in his dressing room, reading his books”¹⁶.— Director Freddie Francis discusses the making of *Tales from the Crypt* (1972).

SYNOPSIS: Five tourists become lost in a crypt. They find themselves locked in an underground chamber with a strange, elderly crypt keeper. One at a time, the crypt keeper analyzes his new guests, and shows them each a disturbing vision.

In the first vision (“And All Through the House”), a beautiful woman named Joanne murders her husband on Christmas Eve. As she disposes of his body, she hears a report on the radio that a

psychotic maniac dressed as Santa Claus has escaped from a mental institution. Before long, this madman is knocking at Joanne's door. Joanne fights to keep the killer out, but her young daughter, believing the man to be Saint Nick, lets him in. Santa Claus kills Joanne, who has been very naughty this year...

Next up, the crypt keeper reveals a fantasy ("Reflection of Death") to a man named Maitland. Maitland has left his wife for his mistress. While out driving with his new lover, there is a terrible accident on the highway. For two long years, Maitland staggers about as a ghoul until he visits the apartment of his mistress. She's been blinded, and believes him dead. When he looks at the mirror, he sees that he is a monster. Suddenly, Maitland awakens from this nightmare to find himself back in the car with his mistress, just before the accident. Then the accident happens again.

Back at the crypt, the crypt keeper shows a wealthy young aristocrat, Jason, a vision of his life ("Poetic Justice"). This nasty man hates his neighbor, a lonely and meek widower named Grimsdyke. Jason causes Grimsdyke to lose his job, and then drives him to commit suicide on Valentine's Day by sending him a bundle of nasty Valentine cards. A year later, Grimsdyke rises from the grave on Valentine's Day, and sends Jason his own bloody valentine.

The crypt keeper next reveals a series of images to a man called Carter ("Wish You Were Here"). In this vision, Carter and his wife have gone bankrupt and are forced to sell their belongings. Together, the couple takes notice of an Oriental statue that bears a legend about three wishes. Carter's wife wishes for money, and Carter is promptly killed, allowing her to inherit his life-insurance money. Carter's wife wishes him back, but that wish goes wrong too, because Carter has already been embalmed...

Finally, the crypt keeper reveals a phantasm to Major Rogers, an uptight military man ("Blind Alleys"). Rogers becomes superintendent at the Elmridge Home of the Blind and sets out to cut costs by skimping on heat, blankets, and even food. When one of the sightless wards dies because of malnutrition and the cold, the blind men take action. They abduct Rogers and his brutal dog, and lock them in separate cages. Then, the blind men starve the dog for

days, until it is literally starving to death. Finally, they release Rogers to walk a narrow passageway lined with razor blades. At the end of the gauntlet, Rogers' hungry dog waits to maul him. Desperate, Rogers is forced to run the wall of razor blades ... with bloody results.

Inside the crypt, the keeper informs his five guests that they may now leave. When they open the door, however, they discover that their destination is Hell. The crypt keeper reveals that his five visions are not their futures ... but their pasts. They are now leaving the crypt where those who have died without repentance must relive their sins...

COMMENTARY: Like *Asylum*, Amicus' *Tales from the Crypt* is an omnibus of horror stories, lumped together under an umbrella of unity. Here, the connection between the five tales is a crypt where tourists have (they believe) become lost. Based on the source material by Bill Gaines, three of the five stories are of the "comeuppance" variety where the scales of justice are righted. The stories are short and bloodily sweet, but only the final one, "Blind Alleys," remains memorable.

"And All Through the House" (later re-made for the HBO series, with Larry Drake as the crazed Santa) is a fun story with some macabre touches. Director Francis contrasts the homicidal actions of Joan Collins with the holy, peaceful music associated with Christmas, and the irony is good for a few giggles. In her desire to clean up her crime, Collins also evokes a little bit of Lady Macbeth, attempting to cleanse her hands of spilled blood. Otherwise, its just routine "stalk'n'slash" as Collins is menaced by a murderous Santa Claus, and undone by her child ... who mistakes the killer for the real thing.

"Reflection of Fear" is the weakest story of the bunch. Ian Hendry stars as a man who has taken up with a mistress, and is consequently punished in two ways. First, he comes back to life as a monstrous ghoul after a car accident. Secondly, the accident, and his fate, seem to repeat. It's all handled in such a speedy, careless fashion that one can't tell if the accident is a flashback, a premonition, or part of an ongoing time loop. And, of all the characters in the film, Hendry seems to least deserve his fate. Sure,

infidelity is bad, but does this guy really deserve to be tortured for eternity because of a decision to leave his wife? Murder of a spouse (“And All Through The House”), and exploitation of the poor (“Blind Alleys”) are much worse abrogations of the human moral code.

Tales from the Crypt gets itself back on track in “Poetic Justice” as a nasty rich man victimizes kindly old Peter Cushing so as to sell his property and make money. This is the only story to really reach the viewer on an emotional level, as it is downright difficult to watch people being nasty to this kindly old man—a widower no less. When Grimsdyke (Cushing) finally commits suicide, the comeuppance begins, and his tormenter becomes the tormented. A bloody Valentine is delivered, and the perverse chill of the magazine is re-captured. It is fun seeing bad people punished in “poetic” ways, and by forging sympathy with Cushing’s character, Francis tells this story effectively.

The fourth story, “Wish You Were Here,” is a detour into ghoulish humor as a series of wishes go badly wrong. It is the kind of uninspired story one might see on *Tales from the Darkside*, *The Hitchhiker*, *Monsters* or any other low-grade TV anthology. Like “Reflection of Fear” it brings the film to a grinding halt.

Fortunately, momentum is revived with “Blind Alleys,” another comeuppance story, but one that is, like “Poetic Justice,” rather effective. Here, a nasty superintendent running a home for the blind skims money for himself by cutting back on heat, food, and other necessities. When a blind ward dies, the superintendent shows no remorse and the blind work together to teach him a lesson. In the end, he is forced to run an alleyway of razor blades to avoid the jaws of his own starving pet ... a frightening climax. The most developed of the five stories, “Blind Alleys,” culminates in a truly harrowing scene that has become legendary, as a wall of razor blades is confronted. This set piece gives the film a necessary lift to its climax.

Today, all of the *Tales from the Crypt* stories seem rather rudimentary, though “Poetic Justice,” “Blind Alleys,” and to a lesser degree “All Through the House,” provoke a feeling of the creeps. The moral aspects of the film are a little dreary, and as an

anthology this film is probably less cohesive than either *Asylum* or 1973's *From Beyond the Grave*. The crypt keeper sequences are flat, and don't contribute much of value to the film. In *Asylum*, there was a solid, dramatic reason to pay attention. Each new "patient" in the asylum was introduced so as to present information and clues about the identity of the mysterious Dr. Starr. Audiences wanted to know who he/she was, and so remained engaged in each succeeding tale.

In *From Beyond the Grave*, it is understood that each character is getting a comeuppance for some wrong done at a "haunted" antique store, as effect follows cause. However, the crypt keeper sequences in *Tales from the Crypt* are pretty purposeless ... until the surprise ending. By the end, the reason these five people have been drawn together in Hell's alcove is quite clear, but you have to get to the climax (and five stories) to find out the answer. Also, *Tales from the Crypt* does not seem to build from story to story. There is a feeling of momentum in both *Asylum* and *From Beyond the Grave*, but "Reflection of Fear" and "Wish You Were Here" kill forward momentum, taking the anthology back to ground zero, and leaving the remaining stories to pick up the slack.

LEGACY: A sequel to *Tales from the Crypt* followed in 1973 entitled *Vault of Horror*. Though these films were mostly forgotten after the 1970s, the *Tales from the Crypt* property (including a far more decomposed, yet animated, crypt keeper) was re-imagined in the late '80s for the HBO TV series (1989–96) of the same name. The pilot episode of the new *Tales from the Crypt* was "And All Through the House," the initial story of the 1972 feature film.

Terror at Red Wolf Inn (1972) * * * 1/2

Cast & Crew

CAST: Linda Gillin (Regina McKee); John Nielson (Baby John Smith); Arthur Space (Henry Smith); Mary Jackson (Evelyn "Evie" Smith); Janet Wood (Pamela); Margaret Avery (Edwina); Michael Macready (Jonathan the Deputy); Earl Parker (Paul the Pilot).

CREW: Manson International and International Releasing Corporation Presents *Terror at Red Wolf Inn*. *Production Manager:* Erik Nelson. *Art Director:* Mike Townsend. *Set Decoration and Props:* Elizabeth Nelson. *Chief Electrician:* Al York. *Key Grip:* Leo Behar. *Script Supervisor:* Patty Sue Townsend. *Sound Mixer:* Bruce Bisense. *Casting:* Sheila Manning. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Service. *Sound Effects:* Rich Harrison. *Titles and Opticals:* Modern Film Effects, Steve Orfanos. *Post-Production:* The Film Place. *Assistant to Producer:* Ted Petit. *Girl on the Set:* Nola. *Original Music:* Bill Marx. *Associate Producers:* Herb Ellis, Allen J. Actor. *Director of Photography:* John McNichol. *Film Editor:* Al Maguire. *Screenplay:* Allen J. Actor. *Produced by:* Michael Macready. *Directed by:* Bud Townsend. *“My Dream” lyrics Written and Sung by:* Marilyn Lovell. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 80 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Regina, a young and naive college girl, returns to her dorm one afternoon to discover she has won a contest: a vacation to the remote resort called Red Wolf Inn. Without contacting anyone, even her mother, Regina takes a charter flight to her isolated destination. Upon landing near the resort, Regina is driven to the old Victorian bed and breakfast by “Baby” John Smith, grandson to Red Wolf Inn owners Henry, a former butcher, and Evelyn. There, Regina meets the other guests, the beautiful model Pamela, and friendly Edwina. When Regina tries to telephone her mother, she learns the phone is out of order. All thoughts of trouble are erased, however, when Henry and Evelyn serve a magnificent meal of ribs.

After the feast, Regina gets sleepy and goes to bed. Meanwhile, something strange seems to be happening with Baby John in the walk-in freezer...

The next morning, Pamela has disappeared without a trace, and Regina hears flies buzzing about an out-building. She discovers one of Pamela’s dresses hanging there, but no sign of Pamela, who has apparently left. Regina eats lunch with Baby John and becomes attracted to him, if frightened by his violent side. When he catches

a baby shark at the beach, he bludgeons it to death.

That night, Henry and Evelyn throw a party for Edwina on her last night at the resort. They all drink champagne and celebrate over another grand meal. After dinner, Edwina packs up to leave, and then sleeps. But, by dark of night, she is chloroformed by Evelyn and Henry, and carried down to the walk-in freezer ... where she is chopped up.

Regina grows suspicious about Edwina's disappearance, and does not believe Evelyn's story that the young woman simply "left" without saying farewell. Suspecting something is amiss, Evelyn attempts to call home, but is prevented from using the repaired telephone by Evelyn. When the police arrive at Red Wolf Inn, Regina thinks she is safe, but the deputy is Baby John's brother, and in on the secret. Regina seeks help from John, but he is afraid to question his grandma's authority. Then, Regina makes a discovery: the decapitated heads of Edwina and Pamela in the freezer. Their bodies have been cut up, and served as meals! Terrified, Regina escapes the house, but is re-captured.

Evelyn and Henry prepare a party for Regina's "last night" at the resort, but Baby John has fallen in love with the visitor, and does not want to eat her. Baby John frees Regina, and they attempt escape, Henry and Evelyn in hot pursuit. There is a final confrontation in the Red Wolf greenhouse, and Baby John kills his grandparents with a meat cleaver.

Sometime later, Regina and Baby John, happily married, have resumed Evelyn and Henry's bizarre culinary habits...

COMMENTARY: The Australian-made *Terror at Red-Wolf Inn* is a scrumptious dessert, a tasty slice of cannibal horror. In the 1970s, the culinary appetites of cannibals were the subject of a variety of notable horror films, including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974), and Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*. *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* is a variation on the themes explored in those films, but the cannibal set is depicted here with a heightened sense of irony, and even fun. In *Red Wolf Inn*, a college girl is tormented by two smiling, senior citizen cannibals who not only run a bed and breakfast, but who want to eat her for dinner.

Unlike *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* offers a light, almost tongue-in-cheek approach to the gruesome material. Though there are chases and moments of high suspense, the feeling of relentless madness so successfully generated in those other memorable pictures is forsaken in favor of a deep, rewarding sense of irony, and a commendable thematic focus on the underlying subject. In *Terror at Red Wolf Inn*, the impulse beneath cannibalism is considered. Specifically, the film deals with appetites and addictions, and how they become unhealthy if carried to extremes.

In fashioning this cinematic banquet, director Bud Townsend focuses repetitively on the meals served at the Red Wolf Inn. Henry and Evelyn constantly talk about eating, and the camera emphasizes close-ups of food in all its succulent forms, whether they be meat, vegetables or starches. It is impossible not to note how central a concern “eating” is in this group, thanks to Townsend’s insistence on showing actors shoveling food into their mouths and smacking their lips. It is an opera of chewing and crunching rapture, almost a sexual orgasm, as the cast of characters fill their cheeks, masticate, sigh, and pause to fill up on drink.

The point is made explicitly through these “dining” montages that humans get hungry, and sate that appetite by eating ... sometimes too much. This is important because one gets the sense that Henry and Evelyn, despite their peculiar pastime, are not bad people. They have just let their appetites get the better of them. The scene is further heightened by the director’s choice of music. “Pomp and Circumstance” plays on the soundtrack during one gluttonous meal, and the ironic implication is that the characters have “graduated” beyond normal tastes and desires, into the realm of the truly dangerous.

The link between food and other human appetites is a running motif in *Terror at Red Wolf Inn*. For instance, when Regina dreams of being “with” Baby John in a sexual sense, food is again called up as the explicit signifier of appetite. In her phantasm, Regina envisions herself making love to John, and then, importantly, stuffing her face with a delicious cake. The desire to fulfill an appetite, to be gluttonous, is the same, *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* tells

us, whether in the arena of sex or eating.

The film is about the feelings and desires we crave as humans, whether they be acceptable (as sex often is not), or unacceptable. Some people eat till it is unhealthy, and are actually addicted to food. Some people enjoy sex too much, and become promiscuous sex-aholics who put themselves in danger with their needs. This film equates those impulses to Evelyn and Henry's appetite to eat human flesh. Regina's dream forecasts her own lack of control, and at the end of the film she gives into her appetites, not only taking John sexually, but becoming a cannibal just like the rest of his family.

It is not an exaggeration to state that everything in *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* is geared towards food. As soon as one understands that fact, and makes the connection between the desire to eat, and what is actually being eaten, it is possible to really enjoy this bizarre, off-beat look at an addiction that is ... outside the mainstream. Every line is fraught with double meanings, considering that the Red Wolf Inn menu consists of human flesh. "Wait till you see what we have for breakfast," Evelyn enthuses. "Eat some lunch, it's your last day," she insists cheerfully, and the audience realize it really will be Regina's last day ... of life. "This is choice, Grade A," Henry states of the lovely and succulent Edwina. And so on. It's all rather funny, and the end credits finally tread outright into humor, presenting the names of the cast and crew as though they were items on the Red Wolf Inn Menu. The film even closes with a line on that menu: "We Reserve the Right to Serve *Anyone*," and it might as well be the picture's ad line.

Like the crazed family in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the cannibals in this film see their "victims" as delicious meals, not people. Trying to reason with them is like talking to a wall. They aren't going to change, and they just want to eat you. You are no more than a cow, a chicken, or any other livestock.

And that is why *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* is scary as well as funny. It is a basic human fear to be eaten. In *Hansel and Gretel*, children fear being "fattened up" and deposited in the witch's oven to be devoured. In *Jaws*, the fear of the shark is coupled with the fear of being eaten alive by another living creature. *Terror of Red Wolf Inn*

understands just how frightening it is to be viewed as “meat” by another being. Since Regina is isolated, all alone in remote Australia, there is no help for her, and the film becomes a deadly game she must escape lest she end up on a platter. *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* is not deeply scary, as are *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, but it is notably suspenseful and fun, a more palatable look at cannibalism, one might even say. Savor it!

LEGACY: The initial set-up of *Terror at Red Wolf Inn*, a college girl lured to a remote vacation spot with a ruse that she has “won a contest,” was repeated in 1998’s *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*.

***The Thing with Two Heads* (1972) * * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ray Milland (Dr. Max Kirshner); Rosey Grier (Jack Moss); Don Marshall (Dr. Fred Williams); Roger Perry (Dr. Phillip Desmond); Kathy Baumann (Patricia); John Dullaghan (Thomas); John Bliss (Donald); Chelsea Brown (Lila); Bruce Kimball (Police Lieutenant); Jane Kellem (Miss Mullen); Lee Frost (Sgt. Hacker); Wes Bishop (dr. Smith); Roger Gentry (Police Sergeant); Britt Nilsson (Nurse); Rick Baker (Gorilla); Phil Hoover (Policeman); Rod Stecle (Medical Salesman); Michael Viner (Prison Guard);.

CREW: American International Pictures and Samuel Z. Arkoff Present a Saber Production of Rosey Grier and Ray Milland as *The Thing with Two Heads*. *Production Supervisor:* Ed Forsyth. *Post-Production Sound Supervisor:* Edward Schryver. *Production Manager:* Roger Gentry. *Key Grip:* Jerry Deats. *Cinematographer:* Jack Steely, Chuck Minsky, Edward Schryver. *Assistant to Producer:* Fred Nyquist. *Production Sound:* Clark Will. *Medical Advisors:* Dr. Cadvan Griffiths, Rod Steele. *Optical Effects and Titles:* Modern Film Effects. *Re-recording Mixer:* George Porter. *Sound:* Ryder. *Prints:* DeLuxe. Vehicles Courtesy of Chrysler Corporation. *Music Produced and Supervised by:* Michael Viner. *Music score by:* Robert D. Ragland. “*The Thing Theme/ Police chase*” *Composed and Performed by:* Porter Jordan. *Additional Music Composed and Performed by:* David Angel and Peter Jordan. *Screenplay:* Lee Frost, Wes Bishop, James Gordon White. *Story by:* Lee Frost, Wes Bishop. *Executive Producer:* John Lawrence. *Produced by:* Wes Bishop. *Directed by:* Lee Frost. *With Thanks to friends:* William Smith, Jerry Butler, George E. Carey, Tommy Cook, Albert

Zugsmith, Dick Whittington. *Mr. Milland's and Mr. Grier's heads re-created by*: Dan Striepeke, Gail Brown, Tom Burman, Charles Schram, James White, Pete Peterson. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running time*: 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Max Kirshner, an expert in transplants, is dying. But instead of going calmly into that good night, Max develops a revolutionary method to transplant a head onto another creature's body. His guinea pig is a gorilla that now has two heads. Eventually, the original head will be removed, leaving a new head to control the original organism's "appropriated" body. Unfortunately, the gorilla breaks free during an operation, flees Kirshner's laboratory, and attacks patrons in a grocery store. It is recaptured and the experiment is successfully completed.

At the Kirshner institute, Dr. Kirshner—a racist and a bigot—is dismayed to learn that a new doctor on his staff, Williams, is African-American. He attempts to fire Williams because of his skin color, but Williams holds him to their legally binding contract and stays on staff. Meanwhile, Kirshner's condition worsens and he grows desperate to survive. Unwilling to let his "genius" die, Max requires a human donor, someone with a healthy body, so his head can be transplanted to it.

Dr. Desmond, Kirshner's friend and associate, arranges with a prison warden to allow a death row convict to donate his body to science for this very cause. Jack Moss, a man sentenced to die for a crime he did not commit, volunteers for the procedure in hopes of gaining extra time to prove his innocence. Moss is transported from prison to Kirshner's private lab. The only hitch is that Jack Moss is black ... and Kirshner hates all blacks. Still, there is no time for such matters because Max is dying.

The operation is conducted, and when Kirshner awakes, he is horrified to learn that his white head has been transplanted onto a black man's body. Jack awakens and is equally displeased to be joined with the bigoted Kirshner. Jack (with Max's head attached to his shoulders...) escapes from the laboratory and demands that Dr. Williams drive him to safety so he can prove his innocence to the world. Williams complies and the police chase the "thing with two

heads.” The authorities set up a roadblock, but Jack evades it. Moss and Williams run across a dirt bike race, steal a bike, and continue to evade police in an incredible demolition derby of police cars.

Jack and Williams then hide out at Jack’s girlfriend’s apartment, even as Max complains. Lila has trouble coping with Jack’s extra head, and Max slowly starts to gain control of Moss’s body. When Williams takes Jack to a hospital where he can amputate Max’s head, Max finally asserts control over Jack’s body and plans to do the surgery to rid the world of Moss. Lila and Williams save Jack at the last moment, and amputate Max’s head. While Williams, Lila and Jack flee for freedom, Max demands that Desmond find him another body...

COMMENTARY: *The Thing with Two Heads* is a cult classic simply because of its ridiculous premise, which one-ups the formula of *The Defiant Ones* by attaching a white man’s head to a black man’s body. Yet much of the enjoyment of the film is the contemplation of that premise itself, and not the execution of the concept. This is a film that should be outrageously funny, and pointed in its societal satire, but which settles instead for car chases and dopey cop humor. The film’s trailer is actually more entertaining than the movie, as Grier and Milland trade racist barbs and put-downs in rapid-fire succession. That same material is spread pretty thin through the actual movie, and the film consequently emerges as a squandered opportunity.

In fairness, *The Thing with Two Heads* actually has some real promise. This is the “Frankenstein” story that 1973’s *Blackenstein* wishes it could have been. The white man (with his science gone awry) experiments on the black man, thus making for a pretty clear allegory of white exploitation of black culture. After all, *The Thing with Two Heads* is a literalization of the notion that the white man has been on the black man’s back for a long time. No longer content merely to wipe out African-American identity, culture and economic fortune, white America now hopes to sap the very physical strength of the black man! White society has punished a black man (Jake) for a crime he didn’t commit, and so now plans to “enslave” his very body under the direction of a white master, Kirshner. That plot line, picking up on the racial divides of the

1970s, opens up all kinds of humorous and satirical possibilities on any number of fronts. The only way it would work better is if Archie Bunker's head had been put on George Jefferson's body (now there's an idea for a sitcom...).

Yet the film doesn't live up to this promise. After a tense and ugly early scene in which Kirshner attempts to fire Williams because of his skin color, the race card is played merely as a tongue-in-cheek joke with toothless references to eating "watermelons" and singing "spirituals." Ultimately, Kirshner learns nothing from his experience perched atop Jack's body, and in the end, Jack doesn't even win back his good name in the eyes of the American people or the law. The film simply ends when white and black are again segregated back to their individual bodies. The law has not been corrected, and racism has not been addressed in any significant way. And, though the film has a few funny lines, it doesn't have nearly enough humor to make the trip worthwhile. Still, one has to giggle at Lila's opening line to Jack (with friend Max attached): "I know you don't like to answer a lot of questions ... but how did this happen?"

The Thing with Two Heads has some convincing special effects and make-up for the 1970s, an impressive, if deeply silly, car chase, and some likable performers, but it never takes the final step and actually explores its premise. It would rather distract the audience with humorous doubletakes than address what it means for white and black to be together in one body. This is one of those movies that would be more fun to read about than to actually watch. On the page, it sounds incredibly funny, but on the screen it's ho-hum, despite the occasional outrageous bits of dialogue (such as Milland's notation to his friend that a particular skull is "not the gorilla's original head...."). Imagine for a moment that this film was re-made today with Jim Carrey's head on Martin Lawrence's body, with Spike Lee directing the affair. Now *that* would be a thing (with two heads...) to see!

Three on a Meathook

CAST: Charles Kissinger, James Pickett, Sherry Steiner.

CREW: *Written and Directed by:* William Girdler.
Produced by: John Asman, Joseph Shulten. *Director of Photography:* William L. Asman. *Film Editor:* Henry Asman. *Music:* William Girdler. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 80 minutes.

DETAILS: William Girdler meets *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in this underlit, gory variation of the Ed Gein crimes. Girdler star Kissinger (*Asylum of Satan* [1971]) is the leader of a barbaric clan that kidnaps and tortures women. Not as charming as its title indicates.

Tombs of the Blind Dead (1972) * * *
(La Noche del Terror Ciego)

Cast & Crew

CAST: Lone Fleming, Cesar Burner, Helen Harp, Joseph Thelman, Rufino Ingles, Veronic Llimera, Simon Arriaga, Francisco Sanz, Juan Cortes, Andres Speizer, Antonio Orengo, Jose Camoiras, Maria Silva.

CREW: Una coproduccion Hispano-Portuguesa. Plata Films S.A.—Madrid and Interfilme—Lisboa.
Art Direction: Paulino Gonzalez, Rafael Ablanque.
Camera: Luis Alcolea, Felix Miron. *Special Effects:* Jose Gomes Soria. *Sound Effects:* Luis Castro. *Set Decorator:* Juan Garcia. *Director of Photography:* Pablo Ripoli. *Music:* Anton Garcia Abril. *Executive Producer:* Salvador Romero. *Producer:* Jose A. Perez. *Director:* Amando De Ossorio.

SYNOPSIS: In Lisbon, two old friends, Betty and Virginia, are unexpectedly reacquainted at a pool near the beach. Virginia's friend Roger suggests they all go camping together, and the next day, they board a train. Virginia is troubled, however, because of an adolescent sexual flirtation she once had with Betty. Disturbed by the memories, as well as Roger's attraction to Betty, Virginia jumps off the train at a remote spot, the deserted village of Berzano.

Alone in the isolated, rural area, Virginia happens upon the ruins of a monastery and graveyard. She spends the night there, unaware it is a hotbed of local legend. Berzano is believed to be haunted by excommunicated Knights Templar who worshipped the devil. Their eyes plucked out by crows, these immortal, bloodsucking zombies roam the countryside by horseback, seeking new victims.

Unfortunately for Virginia, the legend is true, and she is chased and attacked by ambulatory, bony corpses on horseback. She flees for the train tracks, but dies just short of them, even as daylight comes.

Meanwhile, Roger and Betty feel guilty about leaving Virginia behind. They hear the story of Berzano, and ride there to find Virginia. When they arrive at the ruins, a policeman tells them that Virginia has been found dead. They go to the morgue to identify her body and the coroner reports that Virginia was tortured and set upon by at least a dozen animals ... or something *animal-like*. Later, Virginia's corpse stirs in the morgue, attacks an attendant, and drinks his blood.

Roger and Betty visit Professor Cantal at a library, and he tells them more about the Templars and their black magic. In the 13th century, Berzano was the seat of a Templar hierarchy. Now, their evil lives by night. Contrarily, the police suggest the Templar myth is really just a cover for Cantal's son, a small-time thief named Pedro, to cloak his illegal activities. Betty and Roger resolve to meet with Pedro, and learn if he is responsible for Virginia's death. At the same time, the re-animated Virginia heads to the mannequin shop where Betty works. She attacks Betty's co-worker, but is set ablaze and killed.

After meeting Pedro and his girlfriend, a hot-to-trot sort, Betty and Roger ask them to join them in Berzano to assess the truth of the legend. They spend the night in the ruins, and Pedro's moll makes a play for Roger, even as Pedro rapes Betty, an avowed lesbian. Midnight then arrives, and so do the Templars. They kill Pedro first, drinking his blood hungrily. Then they attack Robert, chopping off his arm and killing him. Next they descend upon Pedro's girlfriend, leaving Betty the sole survivor. She runs for her life, and makes for a passing train. The train stops to rescue her, and the Templars follow her on board, killing all the engineers and passengers.

A shell-shocked Betty survives the terror as a train crowded with the cannibal zombies pulls into a populated station. She screams in terror as the Templars attack, her hair now a stark shade of gray....

COMMENTARY: George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) was so inspired an initiative that its undead ethos informed a whole generation of zombie imitators, some of them quite good. In one way or another, *The Omega Man* (1971), *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972), *The Return of Count Yorga* (1972), *Zombie* (1979), and even Romero's own *The Crazies* (1973) owe something to the power of his seminal zombie film. Likewise for *Tombs of the Blind Dead*, a stylish and successful horror picture that takes Romero's prototype as its template and then moves confidently into new, creepy terrain. Though spartan in dialogue and even logic, the film remains a masterpiece of visual horror, and its climax is a riveting, frightening one.

In *Night of the Living Dead*, nobody understands exactly why the dead return to life (though there is the media's explanation of the Venus probe explosion and ensuing radiation). In *Tombs of the Blind Dead*, there is the faintest suggestion of a strange reason behind the Templar terror: *passion*. All of the characters in the film boast barely contained passions that threaten to get out of control. Everybody wants to have sex with everybody else. Betty is interested in Virginia. Virginia is interested in Roger. Pedro rapes Betty, and so forth. Even the Templars are sexual creatures in their own way: sucking, lapping and biting their victims. Each character is defined in terms of sexuality, and one has to wonder if it is this barely contained passion that causes the world to spiral out of control ... as if in response to the hidden desires of the population. If one looks at the construct of the film, the Templars seem to attack when provoked by passion. Virginia, alone in the ruins, is one object of passion, and is killed. Later, Pedro rapes Betty, and the Templars strike again, murdering Pedro. It seems that in this world, sexual desire and aggression lead to attack, and destruction. That's not an uncommon conceit for horror movies, considering the "sex = death" equation of most 1980s slasher films, but it is interesting here as something of an undercurrent.

The idea of co-mingling sexuality, sadism, cannibalism, and

vampirism is nowhere more obvious in *Tombs of the Blind Dead* than in the flashback to the Templar immortality ritual. Their swords cut up a female sacrifice in a truly bloody scene, and Templars then drink her blood. They suck and nurse on her body, a hungry mob, and this is clearly a gross metaphor for some demented sexuality.

The characters are also defined almost entirely in terms of sex. Virginia once had a sexual flirtation with Betty during adolescence. Roger is “with” Virginia but is interested in Betty. Betty identifies herself as a lesbian who has “never been interested in men” because of a “bad experience” in childhood. Pedro, of course, is a rapist, and his girlfriend affirms that she likes “rough men” just as the blind dead arrive to devour her.

In conjunction with all the sexual tension, this material is also highly effective as horror. The Templars, arriving in the dead city on horseback, are photographed in slow motion. The slow motion extends the terror, and heightens the suspense of the chase, yet the climax is probably the most frightening (and best orchestrated moment). Since the Templars are blind, they can only detect victims by sound. As Betty tries to hide from them, she is betrayed by the beating of her own heart, and the monsters detect her. From there, it is an anxiety-provoking race to a passing train, and an unexpected twist as the Templars leave their necropolis, board the vehicle, and massacre all of the passengers! This unexpected blood bath is followed by a series of “still photos” (freeze-frames), a touch right out of *Night of the Living Dead*.

Tombs of the Blind Dead plays on a lot of effective horror tropes, including the trip gone awry, a “scare” scene involving mannequins, and, of course, hungry zombies. Yet what separates this film from the rest of the ghoulish pack is its visual aplomb. After a great first act, the film loses some momentum, but the Templars are genuinely scary. They are slow moving all right, but those bony, decayed hands are going to reach out and grab you, and even your heartbeat could give you away. That’s quite an effective image, and this film makes the most of it, while also making some odd commentary about human passions.

Twins of Evil

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Gustav Weil); Harvey Hall (Franz); Alex Scott (Herman); Frieda Gellhorn (Madelaine Collinson); Maria Gellhorn (Mary Collinson); Katya Wyeth (Kathleen Byron/Mircalla); Roy Stewart (Joachim); Luan Peters (Gerta); Damien Thomas (Count Karnstein); Dennis Price (Dietrich).

CREW: *Produced by:* Harry Fine, Michael Style. *Written by:* Tudor Gates. *Based on Characters Created by:* J. Sheridan Le Fanu. *Director of Photography:* Dick Bush. *Directed by:* John Hough. *Music Conducted and Composed by:* Harry Robinson. *Editor:* Spencer Reeve. *M.P.A.A Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

DETAILS: This is the final movement in the Carmilla/Mircalla cycle initiated by *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and *Lust for a Vampire* (1970). Set in the 19th century, it's the story of a witchhunter (Cushing) who must save the souls of two lovely damsels (The Gellhorn twins, models in real life). As might be expected, there is plenty of nudity and lesbian overtones to go around, but disappointingly, no Ingrid Pitt!

***Westworld* (1972) * * ***

Critical Reception

“The movie’s Orwellian idea has real possibilities, but writer Michael Crichton ... who also does the directing, falls back on the primitive humor of Benjamin as sissy-coward and the tired old cliché of the Revolt of the Machines. The scenario begs for daring, but even in Roman World the orgiasts keep their togas on. What’s the point of fantasy if it’s rated PG?”—Paul D. Zimmerman, *Newsweek*: “Draw, Robot!” December 10, 1973, page 135.

“...moderately entertaining ... its major disadvantage is that Crichton’s idea is—potentially—too ingenious for what he was able to do with it ... you can see that everything has been skimped and that the idea isn’t fully developed.”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, November 26, 1973, page 183.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Yul Brynner (Gunslinger); Richard Benjamin (Peter Morton); James Brolin (John Blane); Norman Bartold (Medieval Knight); Victoria Shaw (Medieval Queen); Dick Van Patten (Banker); Linda Scott (Arielle); Steve Franken (Technician); Michael Mikler (Black Knight); Terry Wilson (Sheriff); Majel Barrett (Miss Carrie); Anne Randall (Servant Girl); Julie Marcus (Girl in Dungeon); Anne Bellamy (Middle Aged Woman); Chris Holter (Stewardess); Charles Seel (Bellhop); Wade Crosby (Bartender); Nora Marlowe (Hostess); Lin Henson (Ticket Girl); Orville Shennan, Lindsey Workman, Lauren Gilbert, David Roberts, Howard Platt (Supervisors); Richard Roat, Jared Martin, David Frank, David Man, Kenneth Washington, Robert Patten, Kip King, Larry Delaney (Technicians); Will J. White, Ben Young, Tom Falk (Workmen).

CREW: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Presents *Westworld*. *Produced by:* Paul N. Lazarus III. *Written and directed by:* Michael Crichton. *Music:* Fred Karlin. *Director of Photography:* Gene Polito. *Art Director:* Herman Blumenthal. *Camera Operator:* Joseph August. *Set Decorator:* John Austin. *Property Master:* Arthur Friedrich. *Special Effects:* Charles Schulthies. *Filmed in:* Panavision and Metrocolor. *Film Editor:* David Bretherton. *Associate Producer:* Michael I. Rachmil. *Unit Production Manager and Assistant Director:* Claude Binyon Jr. *Second Assistant Director:* James Boyle. *Sound:* Richard Church, Harry W. Tetrick. *Make-up:* Frank Griffin, Irving Pringle.

Wardrobe: Richard Bruono, Betsy Cox. *Hairdresser:* Dione Taylor. *Visual Effects Coordinator:* Brent Sellstrom. *Casting:* Leonard Murphy. *Roman World Sequences Filmed at:* Harold Lloyd Estate, Beverly Hills, California. *Action Sequences Coordinated by:* Dick Ziker. *Automated Image Processing:* Information International Inc., John Whitney, Jr. *Presented by:* MGM. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Delos is the amusement park of the future, a realm where rich vacationers can play, love and even “kill” in three robot-populated arenas based on historical epochs: Medieval World, Roman World and Westworld.

A futuristic hovercraft transports a boatload of vacationers to Delos, including Peter and John, two fellas bound for Westworld. Upon arrival at the park depot, Delos employees provide them with cowboy hats, boots, holsters, guns, and all the accouterments of the lawless American frontier of the 1880s. Once inside Westworld, Peter finds the robot humanoids remarkable, and the setting incredibly accurate ... even a little uncomfortable. At the bar, Peter is challenged by a black-garbed gunslinger. In a shoot-out, Peter is victorious, and the vanquished android gunslinger gets dragged away, presumably for repair by Delos personnel.

Later, Peter and John enjoy themselves with robot prostitutes. While the resort sleeps, the town scenario is “re-set” by technicians and workers, and even cleaned by park janitors. Unbeknownst to the guests, Delos scientists, operating under the park in a vast computerized vault, are growing concerned because of an increase in robot breakdowns.

The next morning, the black-garbed gunslinger android returns to kill John, but Peter shoots him dead again ... and is promptly incarcerated in the Westworld jail for murder. John breaks Peter out of prison, and shoots the sheriff during the escape attempt. Consequently, the two men play at being desperados, and ride off into a nearby canyon. There, John is bitten by an android rattlesnake, an indication that something is wrong since none of the robot automatons are supposed to be able to hurt “real” people in

Delos.

Scientists manning the park are warned that they are seeing central mechanism “psychosis,” a very disturbing sign, but they agree not to close the park until the current guests have completed their vacations and gotten their money’s worth.

A more devastating breakdown occurs in Medieval World when the Black Knight, another robot, skewers a human guest. Back in Westworld, the black-garbed gunslinger confronts Peter and John on the streets, resurrected once more, and shoots Peter dead with live bullets. The gunslinger, now augmented with infra-red vision and ultrapowerful hearing mechanisms, chases Peter out of town.

Peter flees Westworld for the canyons beyond, and finally makes it to Roman World. He finds a culvert there that leads down into the scientific underbelly of the amusement park. Inside, Peter finds the scientist operators dead: asphyxiated in their hermetically sealed, temperature-controlled computer vault! With the robot gunslinger still in hot pursuit, Peter tries throwing acid in the thing’s face. This has virtually no effect, and Peter is forced to run for his life to Medieval World. There, he is able to use the royal banquet hall’s fiery torches to fool the gunslinger’s infrared sensors. Using a torch, Peter sets the gunslinger aflame. Charred and blackened, the vengeful machine keeps coming for Peter, seemingly unstoppable...

COMMENTARY: Though *Westworld* is set in a futuristic amusement park, the picture is all horror, rather than science fiction. At its core, it is the story of a chase, of a man being pursued by an unstoppable, inhuman opponent. That’s the stuff of nightmares (and the horror genre), but there is much more to appreciate in the film than its “invincible” enemy antagonist. The film is also a prototype of two future mega hits in the genre, *The Terminator* (1984) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Yet the historical view of *Westworld*, in the end, may not be as important as what the film reveals about mankind as a species.

Taking the notion of Disneyland’s animatronic robots one step beyond contemporary reality (as *The Stepford Wives* [1975] later would, also for purposes of satire and social commentary), *Westworld*’s central action piece is a sustained, relentless pursuit.

Yul Brynner's silver-eyed, menacing gunslinger pursues Richard Benjamin's Peter from venue to venue, unstoppable, and bent on murder ... even revenge. Cleverly, this chase occurs only after the strength and adaptability of the technological villain has been thoroughly established. Brynner, so effective here, creates an iconic villain, an unstoppable machine with no mercy. Mankind has built him, but he sees better than humans, reacts faster, and has the mind of computer. He is the walking, talking embodiment of man's technology out of control. Yes, my friends, science has gone awry.

The film also makes an interesting point by featuring not only a black gunslinger in *Westworld*, but a black knight in Medieval World. The message is implicit: in every historical time period there is an "evil" for man to beat. Even in his own entertainment constructs there must always be a "bad" guy for man to vanquish.

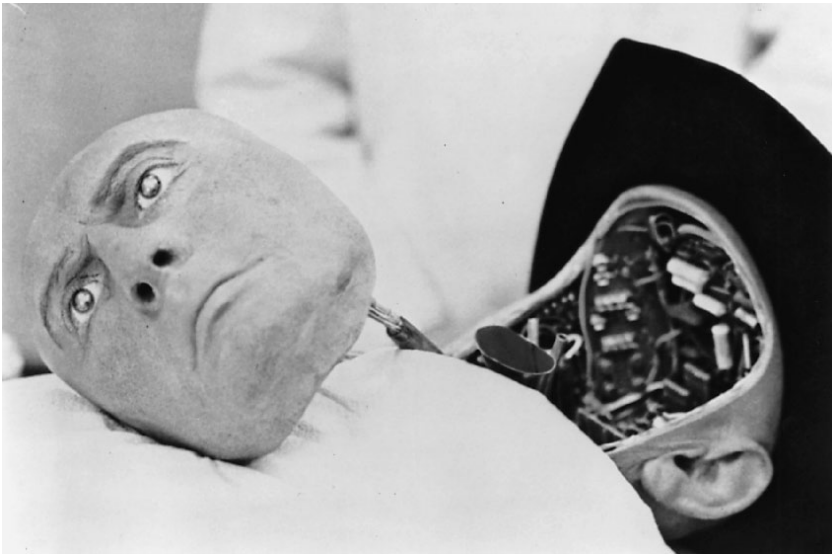
In positing the notion of a merciless, unstoppable robot, *Westworld* forecasts *The Terminator*, a 1984 film by James Cameron. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, *Westworld's* android is equipped with a false "human" face that starts to peel off after sustained battle. Like the Terminator, this android is ultimately consumed with flames, burning away the illusion that he is "like" the men that surround him. And, like his cinematic cousin, the gunslinger ultimately emerges from the flames with no face—only machinery—for one last scare. At that point, the illusion is gone, and the villain boldly represents technology, not man. Of course the idea of unstoppable terror is universal (witness the success of Michael Myers in the *Halloween* franchise!), but it is important to note that both the terminator and the gunslinger represent man's machines gone awry and turned back against him. Even the casting of a "star" in the role of emotionless, pitiless robot villain is carried over in *The Terminator*. The charisma of a Brynner or a Schwarzenegger is sublimated in the protocol of machines.

Yet, truly, *Westworld* has as much in common with Crichton's own *Jurassic Park* as it does *The Terminator*. It is clear that Crichton finds fascination with the ideas of amusement parks (whether it be Jurassic Park or *Westworld*) breaking down, and threatening the very vacationers it is supposed to welcome. But, the similarities go beyond identical premises. A voiceover on the hovercraft,

describing the creation of Westworld, states that “no expense was spared.” This *exact phrase* is repeated in *Jurassic Park*, as park creator Hammond (Richard Attenborough) describes the work that went into that amusement center. What’s that about?

Even beyond that specific dialogue, the stories are structured in similar fashion. In both films, the park control center is ruined and the scientists who might stop the horror are killed before they can be of help. The progenitors of the terror are thus the first to die. In both stories, the park is a vast area, featuring diverse, geographically separated attractions. In *Westworld*, these various places (which provide for action set pieces) are Roman World, Medieval World, and Westworld. In *Jurassic Park*, these attractions are T-Rex paddocks, velociraptor paddocks, and the like.

Also, there are “instructional” videos in each film, describing the layout of the park, and the methods by which the attractions have been created. Clearly, *Jurassic Park* is different only in that it substitutes on-the-loose dinosaurs for on-the-loose robots.



Technology is the new face of terror: The gunslinger’s mechanical innards are revealed in *Westworld* (1972).

Yet, of the two films, *Westworld* is ultimately the richer, because there is a succinct point to all the violent mayhem. Though *Jurassic Park* warns that man should not be arrogant and use his technology to recklessly bring dinosaurs into the 20th century, *Westworld* has a more radical message about humanity. What does it say about mankind that his idea of recreation includes murder? “Killing” robots (not unlike shooting down human-like images in first-person-shooter-style video games...) has become a form of entertainment. It is a sport, a recreation, and relaxation. The androids in the film exist solely to be killed, to be exploited by mankind. Is it any wonder that these “new”-style slaves ultimately revolt against their masters? Consider also that in addition to murdering androids, the vacationers at Delos also engage in sexual relations with the androids. They are mechanical prostitutes, given no opportunity to choose or reject which “john” they sleep with. Is it any wonder that the park’s central mechanism undergoes “psychosis” after this kind of ritual exploitation and abuse?

And what is man’s response to an environment where he can kill, and have sex indiscriminately, and not worry about the rights or feelings of slaves? Peter states that he feels like a “real man” for the first time. That’s a very disturbing thought, and the 1970s were the era in which the “macho man” was vying for superiority with the intellectual, sensitive man of the hippie era. Peter clearly feels inferior to John (Brolin) in the film, because he is not that macho stereotype. When he kills, he feels vindicated, alive. So *Westworld* indicates that what makes us feel good as people (and as males) is hurting and controlling others.

There are other nice touches in *Westworld* that give the film the aura of reality. Dick Van Patten plays an incompetent vacationer. He is slow at the “quick draw,” but nonetheless finds success in this user-friendly tourist trap. His presence captures the notion of “regular folks” out of their element, on vacation. He’s responsible to no one for his own inadequacies and coddled by a corporation that has been well paid to provide him a fantasy and illusion.

Also, Crichton pauses the main action to reveal the inner workings of the park in a terrific (and surreal) sequence set at night, in which Delos employees (dressed in blue jumpsuits) thoughtlessly carry out

robot corpses (to be repaired and returned to the arena). Mass killing has become just a hassle then, a thing to be cleaned up.

Westworld is a fast-paced, action-packed look at an environment that is designed to appeal to the worst in human nature. On the surface is the false reality of Westworld, and underneath is the inner working of that world—the technology and effort necessary to maintain the park and allow the humans to keep whoring, killing, and sating other base appetites. That's a highly workable premise, and when Yul Brynner, a slave to human vanity, finally stands up and refuses to take it anymore, the film kicks into horror gear, and the message is plain. What man has forged to serve him will dominate him unless stopped, or, conversely, treated with common decency.

LEGACY: A sequel, *Futureworld*, premiered in 1976, with Peter Fonda assuming Richard Benjamin's role. In 1980, a TV series starring Connie Selleca, *Beyond Westworld*, saw the murderous androids return for three episodes ... before a hasty cancellation. *Westworld* is being re-made for a 2003 release with Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Yul Brynner role.

1973

And Now the Screaming Starts

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Dr. Pope); Herbert Lom (Henry Fengriffen); Ian Ogilvy (Charles Fengriffen); Stephanie Beacham (Catherine Fengriffen); Patrick Magee (Dr. Whittle); Guy Rolfe (Maitland).

CREW: *Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker. *Produced by:* Max. J. Rosenberg, Milton Subotsky. *Executive Producer:* Gustav Berne. *Written by:* Roger Marshall. *Director of Photography:* Denys Coop. *Film Editor:* Peter Tanner. *From Amicus. M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.

Running Time: 91 minutes.

DETAILS: This Amicus film revives the old “evil severed hand” horror cliché, satirized in modern fare such as *Evil Dead II: Dead by Dawn* (1987) and *Idle Hands* (1999). Peter Cushing leads an all-star British cast in this gothic story of a severed limb killing “cursed” denizens of the House of Fengriffen.

***Blackenstein: The Black Frankenstein* (1973) * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: John Hart (Dr. Stein); Ivory Stone (Dr. Winifred Walker); Liz Renay (Woman in Bed); Roosevelt Jackson (Malcolm); Andrea King (Eleanor); Nick Bolin (Bruno Strager); Joe De Sue (Eddie Turner/ The Monster); Jim Cousar (Police Sgt. Jackson); Bob Brophy (Hospital Attendant); Beverly Hagerty (Girl in Car); Dale E. Bach (Girl in Dune buggy); Cardella De Milo (Night Club Singer); Andy E (Night Club Comedian); Daniel Faure (Boy in Car); Don Bodie (Police Lt. Turner); Jerry Soucie (Man in Bed); Karen Lind (Hospital Supervisor); Yvonne Robinson (Hospital Receptionist); Robert L. Hurd, Maria Farmer (Couple in Car).

CREW: Frank R. Saletri Presents *Blackenstein*.
Executive Producer: Ted Tetrick. *Director of Photography:* Robert Caramico. *Music:* Cardella De Milo, Lou Frohman. *Written and Produced by:* Frank R. Saletri. *Directed by:* William A. Levey. *Production Manager:* F.A. Miller. *Assistant Director:* Paul Heslin. *Second Assistant Director:* Don Goldman. *Assistant to Producer:* Don Brodie. *Film Editor:* Bill Levey. *Assistant Editor:* M. Indergand. *Assistant Cameraman:* Bob Isenberg. *Production Sound:* Dick Damon. *Script Supervisor:* Judy Redland. *Boom Man:* Ray Hill. *Property Master:* Bud Costello. *Gaffer:* Larry Lapoint. *Key Grip:* Earl Tunberg. *Best Boy:* Frank Smith. *Electrician:* Stu Spohn. *Make-up:* Gordon Freed.

Prosthetic Construction: Bill Munns. *Make-up Staff:* Jerry Soucie. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Sharon Lally. *Special Effects:* Frank R. Saletri, Ken Strickfadden. *Production Assistant:* Edward A. Interrera. *Production Secretary:* Christine Trill. *Stunt Advisor:* Joe Pronto. *Stunt Man:* Robert Hurd, Jay Goldher. *Post-Production:* The Jamez. *Music and Sound Effects:* Walco Productions. *Titles and Opticals:* Cinefx. *Color:* Deluxe. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* NR. *Running time:* 93 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: The beautiful African-American Dr. Winifred Walker arrives at the palatial home of Nobel Prize-winning Dr. Stein. His black assistant, Malcolm, escorts her to the doctor's laboratory. Walker tells Stein of her fiancé Eddie Turner, who lost his arms and legs in the Vietnam War, and is living without hope. Stein, who won his honors for solving the "DNA code," agrees to take a look at his case. They visit Eddie at the veterans' hospital, unaware that a sadistic orderly has been mistreating him, and arrange for him to be transferred to Stein's home laboratory at once.

Winifred studies Stein's work, becoming familiar with patients Eleanor and Bruno. Eleanor is ninety years old, but Stein has made her look considerably younger by tampering with her genetic code, and he has modified Bruno's DNA so he could grow a replacement leg. Together, Stein and Winifred conduct a three-part experiment on Eddie, using genetic material to spur the growth of new limbs.

Meanwhile, Malcolm reveals to Winifred that he has fallen in love with her. She politely rejects him, saying she hopes to marry Eddie when he is made whole again. Malcolm becomes jealous of Eddie, and decides to sabotage his treatment.

On the verge of recovery, Eddie suddenly falls ill, and evidence is shown that his medication has been tampered with. Instead of the stable DNA serum, he has been given an unstable RNA serum, which spurs the growth of animal-like appendages as well as encouraging "throwback" physical development. Eddie develops a neanderthal brow (and a giant afro...) and awakens as a lumbering monster. By night, he returns to the veterans' hospital and murders the cruel orderly who tormented him. Then he kills a white couple

at their house. Though he returns to Stein's home by day, Eddie goes rampaging again the following night, murdering a teenager.

The police soon arrive to question Dr. Stein about the murders, but he reveals nothing of his work. By night, Eddie escapes once more, and kills a black couple making out behind a local nightclub. Back at the lab, Malcolm attempts to rape Winifred. Eddie saves her, and kills Malcolm. Then he kills Stein and all his patients. Eddie leaves the lab, abducts another woman, and kills her too. The police send in vicious attack dogs to bring the monster down, and they succeed.

COMMENTARY: *Blackenstein: The Black Frankenstein* is a very bad film. The 1970s blaxploitation trend resulted in some solid, well-acted horror movies (including *Blacula* [1972] and *J.D.'s Revenge* [1976]), but this is not one of them. The film is hampered by a very low budget, and by a weak script that seems to have only been half completed when shooting was finished.

It is important to note that the idea to re-arrange horror legends for contemporary black audiences is a good one. As clumsy as this film is, legends like *Frankenstein* need new faces, new focus, new energy, new perspectives and new creators to stay relevant in today's fast-moving pop culture. The African-American, post-Vietnam experience could have been a very powerful context for this timeless story, and resulted in a daring re-interpretation of the *Frankenstein* ethos. That said, none of that happens in this movie.

Blackenstein's low budget is clearly a stumbling block. Dr. Stein's lab is a bare room decorated with equipment that looks to be on loan from the 1940s Universal Studios. The lighting in the lab is garish, half-red/half-dark, in an attempt to hide the skimpy props. But more importantly, the film could not apparently afford a master actor, like the great William Marshall. Consequently, the performances here are not up to the level established by *Shaft*, *Blacula* and other films of the time. William Marshall, a man of great intelligence and dramatic strength, surely would have helped matters, for he understands the literary tradition and weight of roles such as Dr. Frankenstein.

The script is weak too, more explicit than witty. Indeed, it appears the script was abandoned (or left unfinished). About half way

through the film, all dramatic action stops, and the movie is a shambles. Eddie (the monster) kills, kills, kills, and we lose track of Winifred, the doctor, and the story set-up.

Part of the problem involves Eddie's attacks. After dispatching the cruel orderly, he randomly kills unsuspecting, unfamiliar people, whether they deserve it or not. The last battle of the film involves Eddie's pursuit of a white woman, who has never been seen before. Since she is a random victim, randomly selected by the monster, the audience has no identification with her and no suspense is generated. The audience does not even know her name! It is also a huge disappointment that Eddie becomes a murderous monster with little or no memory of who/what he was in a human sense. The pathos of the *Frankenstein* legend is that the monster has some traits of humanity remaining within him. Those traits are absent in *Blackenstein*, and so is the pathos. There is no sense of loss, because Eddie never seems to realize how his humanity has slipped away. He never has a moment of hesitation or reflection.

Put bluntly, race *should* have been an issue in *Blackenstein*. More succinctly, it should have been the primary issue of the film. Why else revise *Frankenstein* with an African-American cast? The black experience in America in the early '70s should have been the context of this story, yet it is ultimately just a backdrop that is quickly tossed aside in favor of violent murders. For instance, Dr. Stein is a white Jew. Shouldn't some significance be attached to that fact? That he is a white man, literally exploiting the bodies of blacks for his experiments, seems important. It is never even mentioned, and worse, Stein and "his" monster seem to have no relationship to one another at all. That relationship, of creator and monster (or master and slave?), could have made this film really interesting, and it is usually the core of any *Frankenstein* story. Considering the patronizing "father" relationship that many whites impose on blacks, a great story could have been forged here about arrogant creator and rebellious son.

What about the fact that Eddie lost his limbs fighting a war for the white establishment? That is another story point that might have added purpose to Eddie's killings. Had he been avenging himself against the white America that sent him to Vietnam and than

renounced its responsibility to take care of him, the film would have had a powerful narrative thrust. As it is, that idea is only minimally enunciated. That Eddie attacks a white girl, and drags her away off-screen (implying he will do more than just kill her...), is a racially charged image that also could have been used to the film's advantage. What if the police had hunted Eddie down because they perceived him as a different kind of monster, a "big black man" raping a white woman? Again, the racial overtones could have added significance to a story just crying out for some kind of theme or meaning.

Perhaps the point is that *Frankenstein* need not be re-imagined in an African-American coloring unless it addresses the concerns and experience of that community. Instead, this film wants to be color blind, content to update the story but not consider how that updating should actually affect the story. It is a terrible fact that all plotting in *Blackenstein* ceases completely the moment Eddie is transformed into a "monster." That is a mistake, because the film does not address why he is a monster. Malcolm (a black man) sabotages his serum. Shouldn't that fact mean something in the context of African-American culture and relationships? There are so many possibilities for a "black" Frankenstein, but this movie seizes on none of them. It is content to stick an afro hairdo on the Frankenstein monster's square head, and then set the monster loose on random people.

This film is a terrible disappointment, considering the potential, and one cannot help but be reminded of *Blacula* again. That film depicted a proud African prince sold into "vampire" slavery and re-named by a white Dracula. That film depicted a Van Helsing who had to cope not only with a vampire, but a white police force that was disposed to distrust him. Black culture was celebrated at the same time that a black man's role in white society was exposed. And it was scary, involving and well acted. *Blackenstein* is a very empty film in comparison, blind to the implications of its own colorful story.

Blood Couple (1973) (aka Ganja & Hess) * * *

Critical Reception

“As a black-oriented contemporary horror study, *Ganja & Hess* ... is dedicated to what is obviously meant to be a serious theme. The artistry for which it strives, however, is largely vitiated by a confusingly vague mélange of symbolism, violence, and sex.”—A. H. Weiler, *New York Times*: “Gunn’s *Ganja & Hess* Opens,” Saturday, April 21, 1973.

“At the heart of the film lies vampirism as a metaphor for capitalism and cultural imperialism, dramatizing in horror movie iconography how some human beings live off the blood, sweat, and toil of others.... Thus *Ganja and Hess* symbolize the “real life” issues that plague the African-American community, such as drug abuse or selling out to materialism ... *Ganja & Hess* attempted to use the horror film as a means of interrogating race, ... gender, sexuality, religion, and class. Pigeonholed into the existing categories of blaxploitation genre film or independent art film, *Ganja & Hess* satisfied neither audience....”—Harry M. Benshoff, *Cinema Journal*: “Blaxploitation Horror Films: Generic Reappropriation or Reinscription?” Volume 39, No. 2, Winter 2000, pages 43–45.

“This deals with black traditions in a well-intended but mind-dulling fashion, its pacing is slow and its moments of action infrequent.... Good black music accompanies the tale, but nothing saves this from its own stuffiness.”—John Stanley, *Creature Features Strikes Again*, 1994, page 48.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Duane Jones (Dr. Hess Green); Marlene Clark (*Ganja Meda*); Bill Gunn (*George Meda*); Sam Waymon (Reverend Luther Williams); Leonard Jackson (*Archie*); Candace Tarpley (*Girl in Bar*); Richard Harrow (*Dinner Guest*); John Hoffmeister (*Jack Sergeant*); Betty Barney (*Singer in Church*);

Mabel King (Queen of Myrthia); Tommy Lane (Pimp); Tara Fields (Woman with a baby); With: The Congregation of Evangel Revivaltime Church.

CREW: Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, Inc., in association with Heritage Enterprises, Inc., Presents *Blood Couple*. *Written and Directed by:* Bill Gunn. *Director of Photography:* James E. Hinton. *Editor:* Victor Kanefsky. *Production Designer:* Tom John. *Executive Producers:* Quentin Kelly, Jack Jordan. *Produced by:* Quentin Kelly, Chiz Schultz. *Associate Producer:* Joan Shigekawa. *Production Supervisor:* Ed DeSisso. *Production Manager:* Lou Pastore. *Assistant Director:* Anthony Major. *Script Supervisor:* Renoir Darrett. *Musical Director:* Ed Bland. *African Instruments Played by:* Nadi Qamar. *March Blues Sung by:* Mabel King. *Special Audio Effects:* Mike Lobel. *Costumes Designed by:* Scott Barrie. *Sound:* Ron Love. *Second Cameraman:* Charles Blackwell. *Lighting Director:* Bill Lister. *Final Mix:* Gary Leibman. *Property Master:* James Walker. *Key Grip:* Rex North. *Best Boy:* Dennis Murphy. *Re-recording:* Emil Nerod. *Assistant Sound:* Bill Meredith. *Make-up:* Scott Cunningham. *Hair Stylist:* Annie De Mille. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 110 minutes.

P.O.V.

“There are times when the white critic must sit down and listen. If he cannot listen and learn, than he must not concern himself with black creativity.... I want to say that it is a terrible thing to be a black artist in this country ... for reasons too private to expose to the arrogance of white criticism....”¹⁷.—director Bill Gun, in a letter to the *New York Times*, regarding reviews of *Ganja & Hess* (1973).

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Hess Green, a wealthy scholar in the long-dead Nigerian civilization of Myrthia, befriends a colleague, George

Meda, and invites him to stay at his opulent home. Green is gratified to learn from Meda that a Myrthian ceremonial dagger has been discovered, and wonders how this artifact fit into the culture, which died of vampirism and pernicious anemia so long ago.

As Green studies the dagger, he also learns that Meda is unstable, even suicidal. He prevents George from hanging himself that night, but later George goes on a bloody rampage. He stabs Hess repeatedly with the ceremonial dagger and then commits suicide. To Green's shock, he does not die from his stab wounds. Instead, the dagger has infected him with the same form of vampirism that destroyed Myrthia. He drinks George's spilled blood, and hides the corpse.

Vowing never to kill another human being, Green gets his "fix" from local blood banks. His rule soon falls by the wayside, however, when his habit grows too strong, and he murders a hooker and her pimp to drink their precious blood.

Before long, George's beautiful wife, Ganja, returns to the United States from Amsterdam, looking for her husband. She moves in with Hess, unaware that George is dead. Though she is suspicious of Hess at first, Ganja and Hess soon develop a romance. Later, Ganja discovers George's corpse in the freezer behind Hess's wine cellar, and confronts her lover. Hess reveals that George took his own life, and further confesses that he drank George's blood. Ganja accepts his explanation and his peculiar perversion, and asks Hess to marry her.

Ganja and Hess wed, but Hess is so smitten with Ganja that he wants her to live forever. One night he murders his beautiful wife, and revives her as a vampire. To satiate their appetites, Ganja and Hess then invite an attractive black man for dinner one night. Ganja makes love to him, and then murders him, drinking his blood. Despite her indoctrination into the way of the vampire, Ganja is troubled by her new existence. Hoping to end their torturous, eternal lives, Hess and Ganja learn that only the shadow of the crucifix can bring them the peace of death. Hess goes to a chapel, seeking redemption in Jesus Christ, and then enlists Ganja's help in dying before the shadow of the cross.

After Hess dies, Ganja continues to live...

COMMENTARY: Perhaps Bill Gunn hasn't created a masterpiece in *Blood Couple*, but he has directed a challenging, and interesting ... if muddled ... film. Though the version reviewed here was cropped awkwardly for home video release, and it appears that a low-budget hampered the look of the film, overall *Blood Couple* is an inventive, ambitious work that seeks to re-interpret vampirism in the context of the AfricanAmerican community and experience. It's a film that will not satisfy most plot-minded or detail-oriented horror fans, but it is valuable nonetheless for the debate it fosters about addiction, the role of Christianity in the black community, and the essence of vampirism (defined here as, essentially, the feeding on others).

Gunn has written that white critics are not equipped (or willing) to appreciate his 1973 contribution to horror cinema. That may be true, for *Blood Couple* clearly flouts accepted critical expectations and traditions. The film develops in an unconventional manner, at its own languorous pace, and the narrative is, at times, secondary to symbolism.

And, Gunn has chosen as his mode of expression the horror genre, a format critics are predisposed to denigrate anyway, so his film already has two strikes against it. In this case, the low budget, coupled with the horror concept, was probably enough to turn away most reviewers willy-nilly. This is not institutional racism, however, so much as genre discrimination, pure and simple. Many horror films, have, over the years, failed to get a fair shake from critics because of subject matter. One can glance over reviews for *The Exorcist* and reel at the vicious critical attacks heaped upon it. No quarter was given the film upon its initial release, no notice of its inherent artistry. *Blood Couple* is not in the same class as *The Exorcist*, but it met the same kind of unfriendly reception.

Bill Gunn is a director with a lot on his mind in *Blood Couple*, and the "surface" story of two African-Americans who become vampires, is co-joined with a number of interesting sociological points. On its most transparent level, the film notes uneasily that Hess, despite his wealth, is still part of the American underclass. "I'm the only colored man on the block," he anxiously reveals to George Meda at one point, fearful of a confrontation with the (white) police

establishment. This notation also reminds the audience, paradoxically, that Hess is apart and separate from other members of the African-American community. Because of his wealth and status, he has chosen to live away from his “own kind.” Thus he is at home in neither world.

That’s an important distinction, because, ultimately, Ganja and Hess only “feed” on their own kind. When they become vampires, they kill pimps, hookers, and the poor ... notably all inner city black people, not suburban whites. Without reaching too deep into the well of film analysis, it is easy to see that Gunn is making a statement about blacks who “leave behind” their brothers and sisters. They become vampires (like the white man), literally feeding on and exploiting those who are less affluent.

Accordingly, when Hess dreams, he is torn. On one hand, the priestess from Myrthia beckons him to Africa, his ancestral home. In the same dream, however, he sees a masked white man laughing at him. Each one of these figures represents a “side” of Hess. On one hand is the African origin, the family and the history of his people. On the other is a cackling white man whose true motives are obscured by that mask. The white man of Hess’s dreams may represent a society Hess can never be a part of, though he attempts to inhabit it. He senses that the white man is laughing at him for attempting to integrate himself into a world where he will always be marked as different, or outside.

Blood Couple is also pretty clearly an indictment of drug use. Hess abhors the fact that vampirism is an addiction, and that he now has a “habit to support.” Worse, his values and morals do not survive the overriding addiction to blood. When he first becomes a vampire, Hess establishes that he will not kill to eat. That edict goes out the window in no time flat, when he hungrily feeds from a pimp and a hooker in the African-American community. The point is plain: morality does not survive in the face of an overwhelming addiction. Hunger becomes everything, and the beast must be fed.

What’s a little odd about *Blood Couple* is that it so clearly supports the Christian religion. The soundtrack establishes that Africans (like the Myrthians) were “cursed to walk the Earth till the Christians came.” Likewise, Hess ultimately finds salvation in a community

church. He is freed of his curse (vampirism) by his belief in and acceptance of Jesus, and his final surrendering to that icon of Christianity, the crucifix.

Yet, and here's the contradiction, Christianity is, no doubt, a construct of "white society." Christianity was "given" to Africans and other blacks (ex-slaves) by Christian missionaries. Yet the black culture has embraced Christ and his teachings in a very deep way. So, in *Blood Couple* there is a lauding of white religion, and even a sense that the Myrthians died because, in essence, they were pagans who fed on themselves. That's where the muddle part comes in. Is one to believe that the film is actually an indictment of black culture and origins, because they didn't imagine Christ the Messiah? Or, is the film noting that, in the final analysis, a "white" religion can save the black man? It takes a more insightful reviewer than this one to be certain, but director Gunn will be gratified, at least, to know that I have my ears up.

What is highly rewarding about *Blood Couple* as a film is that Gunn has apparently felt no pressure to express his messages within the confines of "acceptable" film technique. He has not created an easy film that draws on a century of "white" filmmaking dogma. Instead, he uses film in a wholly individual way. There is a formality and theatricality in the way the characters of *Blood Couple* talk, and it is as much stage play as film. Also, scenes are included in the film not for their contribution to the narrative, but rather for their enhancement of the overall mood.

One of the climactic scenes in the film is set in the African-American chapel to a choir's singing. It goes on and on and on ... almost endlessly. It has not been cut with an eye for pacing, speed, or narrative clarity. On the contrary, the scene continues for sometime and thereby builds an interesting feel and texture the longer it lasts. This scene evokes a curious feeling in the viewer. It starts slow, builds a tempo, and leads ultimately to a sort of rapturous release. It is not done through writing, directing, or any editorial technique. It is done primarily through song ... and sweat. Gunn's camera holds back, lets the audience soak in the music, and watches Jones swaying to the music that can deliver him from vampirism. It's interesting.

But if Gunn is inventive with his approach to this material, he is also insightful about how to manipulate more common film techniques. There are many high-angle shots throughout the film, in which the participants are, literally, looked down upon. This shot, accepted film language for entrapment or doom, helps to create the sense that these characters are all marching to an unpleasant fate. The crosscutting between the marriage celebration of Ganja and Hess and the removal of George's corpse from the Hess residence is also ironic, and clever. One life begins, another ends, and the crosscutting (serving as counterpoint) reminds the audience of that fact.

This is clearly a director who understands film technique, but who is also willing to be innovative as well as to kowtow to tradition. One of the best scenes in the film is an erotic sex scene that entangles physical lust with blood lust. Like the scene in the congregation, this sequence is nearly mesmerizing.

Blood Couple is a film to grapple with. It is filled with poetic voice-overs, fascinating imagery, and mood-altering moments. It is saddled with some awkward scene bridges and a sense that more could have been achieved with greater resources. The message may be a muddle, but the pictures are highly memorable. As an art film, it's pretty provocative. But for a viewer conditioned to the pacing, style and feel of more traditional horror movies, it's only moderately successful.

The Crazies (1973) * * * 1/2

Critical Reception

"...evenly split in its virtues and flaws. The plot is close to George C. Scott's *Rage*, about the effects of germ warfare.... The approach is different, with scenes utilizing various styles: mock documentary, drama, melodrama, and some inspired sequences of horror and comedy which often touch on the cinema of the absurd ... good, cinematic fun."—
Roy Frumkes, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIV,
Number 4, May 1973, page 306.

“...much less pretentious than *The Omega Man*, much nastier, and also more fun.”—John Brosnan, *Future Tense*, St. Martin’s Press, 1978, page 200.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Lane Carroll (Judy); W.G. McMillan (David); Harold Wayne Jones (Clank); Lloyd Hollar (Colonel Peckman); Lynn Lowry (Kathy); Richard Liberty (Artie); Richard France (Dr. Watts); Harry Spillman (Major Ryder); Will Disney (Dr. Brookmyre); Edith Bell (Lab Technician); Will Thunhurst, Jr. (Brubaker); Leland Starnes (Shelby); A.C. MacDonald (General Bowen); Robert J. McCully (Hawks); Robert Karlowsky (Sheriff Cooper); Ned Schmidtke (Sgt. Tragesser); Tony Scott (Deputy Shade); Roy Cheverie (Army Doctor); Jack Zaharia (Priest). With: Stephen Liska, David Meek, Roger Brown, Kim Smith, Billy Hinzman Richard Lewick, William C. Kennedy, Malynda Parker, Walter Cook, Pig Tilbrook, Vince Survinski, Norman Chese, Ross Harris.

CREW: Lee Hessel presents *The Crazies*. *Produced by:* A.C. Croft. *Directed by:* George A. Romero. *Director of Photography:* William Hinzman. *Edited by:* George A. Romero. *Based on an Original Script by:* Paul McCollough. *Screenplay by:* George A. Romero. *Production Managers:* Rob Rutkowski, H. Cramer Riblett, Vince Survinski. *Post-Production Coordinators:* Bob Rutkowski. *Sound Recordists:* Rex Gleeson, John Stoll. *Sound Technicians:* Eric Bacca, Michael Gornick. *Production Coordinator:* Edith Bell. *Script-Girl:* Bonnie Hinzman. *Miss Carroll’s Make-up:* Doris Dodds. *Make-up Consultant:* Gloria Natalie/Justine Ltd. *Make-up:* Bonnie Priore. *Special Effects:* Regis Survinski, Tony Pantanello. *Assistant Cameraman:* John Fitzpatrick. *Assistant to Editor:* Joe Colazzi. *Medical Advisor:* Barry J. Rosenbaum, MD. *Grips:* David Meek, Robert Karlowski, John

Atkinson. *Military Advisor*: Colonel Bernard Garred, Ret. *Song*: “*Heaven Help Us*” *Composed by*: Carole Bayer-Sager and Melissa Manchester. *Sung by*: Beverly Bremers, Courtesy of Scepter Records, Inc. *Musical Director*: Stephen Metz. *Musical Score*: Bruce Roberts. *Associate Producer*: Margaret Walsh. *Color*: Movielab. *Produced by*: Pittsburgh Films through the facilities of the Latent Image Inc., Pittsburgh. A Cambist Film. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running time*: 105 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Evans City, a man goes crazy in his house, kills his wife, attacks both his children and then sets his home on fire. The local fire department responds, along with a nurse named Judy. More surprisingly, the U.S. army intervenes, garbed in gas masks and white environmental suits! Judy learns that her quiet little town is now under quarantine. This frightens her because she is pregnant, and her physician friend suggests she hide with lover David until things quiet down. He then gives her a single hypodermic of vaccine. Judy flees the doctor’s office at his urging, and meets up with David.

The U.S. government believes that a plane crash in the area caused the release of Trixie, a deadly chemical agent, in Evans City. The military brass decides to launch a plane carrying a nuclear bomb, just in case the situation gets out of hand. Martial law is declared, and the army rounds up a defiant populace, breaking into private residences and herding citizens into a makeshift infirmary in the high school gym. The truth is that Trixie is no virus, but a bacteriological weapon accidentally released by the government into the water supply.

Meanwhile, soldiers capture Judy and David before she can share the vaccine with him. They are thrown in the back of a truck with other townspeople, but soon escape. With friend Clank and with Mr. Arties and his grown daughter, Kathy, Judy and David seek refuge in a country club away from town. They have good reason to be scared because the army has confiscated all weapons in the area, and is shooting down anyone who stands up to it.

While David and the others squabble over what course to take,

army scientists fight too. They burn the bodies of the dead, seek a cure, and argue over who is to blame. Trixie is particularly insidious because it causes insanity, and it is difficult to judge when someone is merely panicked or actually raving mad...

Before long, David and Judy get a look at the madness close up. Mr. Arties tries to rape his daughter ... revealing they are both infected. Even Clank falls ill, becoming a homicidal maniac who shoots soldiers down in cold blood without a second thought. David comes to believe that he's immune to Trixie, and thus of vital importance to the scientists, but soon he, Judy and Clank are on the run from soldiers again.

Dr. Elston, a scientist from the Trixie project, works long hours and eventually finds an antidote to the disease. But, through military blundering, he is put in with the Evans City crazies, and shot dead before he is able to share his data or stop the epidemic.

Judy falls ill while on the run, and the army kills her. David is captured as Trixie spreads to Louisville. David is brought to the makeshift lab but conditions are so bad that no one remembers to test him for immunity. A hostile David, mourning the murder of his wife and unborn child, doesn't say a word. Desperate, the military pulls out of Evans City ... a town that now belongs permanently to the crazies. At least until the nukes...

COMMENTARY: In a bizarre coincidence, this reviewer screened George Romero's *The Crazies* on Easter Sunday of the year 2000, exactly one day after a government raid was staged in Miami, Florida, to recover Elian Gonzalez. There is, of course, an infamous photograph of that raid featuring a helmeted federal soldier breaking into a civilian household and taking the 6 year old by force, and at gunpoint. No doubt, George Romero never intended such a connection, but *The Crazies*, a tale of military power run amuck, looks markedly less paranoid in light of this contemporary situation.

Unlike *Night of the Living Dead*, which was a personal apocalypse set around a societal one, *The Crazies* casts a wider net, detailing the societal apocalypse, but with a sampling of personal stories to flavor the tale. Romero's primary target of ridicule this time is the

government controlled military, an “invasion army” set loose in suburban modern America, and his images are provocative, and even inflammatory.

In its highlighting of martial law in middle-class America, *The Crazies* pulls no punches. There are multiple shots of armed soldiers breaking into homes, into bedrooms, into private residences, with no restrictions and no explanations. We see the federal army occupy a town’s main street, stationed in front of a post office, and shooting down U.S. citizens (in the back, no less...) as the people run. The soldiers steal wallets, loot jewelry and similarly misbehave in the homes they occupy, revealing themselves to be little more than thugs and thieves. Romero’s point is, perhaps, that freedom in America is just one executive order away from destruction. An army with free reign, capable of killing those who resist the occupation, can destroy every principle America is founded upon.

The Crazies is a stunning view of the manner in which a government equipped with a strong military can turn on its own people who are powerless to stop it. Why tell such a story? Well, remember that *The Crazies* was made in 1972-1973, a time when much of the country was decrying President Richard Nixon as “King Richard,” a monarch who seemed especially fond of his own executive authority. The Vietnam War—an unpopular conflict with many American people—continued to rage with no end in sight, and the voices of the community—who wanted it stopped—were not being heard.

Indeed, much of *The Crazies* plays out as a Vietnam War allegory. Without warning, the full power of the American military arrives in a smaller community, a simple, rural town. The people are rounded up and killed because their perceived condition (insanity) is believed to be a threat to United States national security. It is not hard to read “insanity” as “Communism” in this setting. Indeed, the Vietnamese people become, in a way, the people of Evans City. A priest, driven to madness by the situation, pours gasoline over his body and then immolates himself, a direct parallel to that famous image of a Buddhist monk during the Vietnam conflict. And, importantly, who is the one person who has a natural immunity to Trixie? It is David, a Vietnam War veteran. Why is he immune?

Because he has seen insanity before ... in Vietnam, in fact.

The Crazies is an existentialist movie, a picture that reveals how life and death hinge on ridiculous circumstances. A scientist discovers a cure for Trixie, but is shot by the military before he can save the world. David is immune to Trixie, but the confused military never tests him for immunity, and so on. It is an absolutely absurdist and paranoid depiction of what life in America would look like under martial law, and it is a frightening, cold image.

Romero's filmic style (which inevitably includes frenetic, rapid-fire editing) contributes to the film's sense of insanity. A city "up to its ass" in soldiers (dehumanized by the white environmental suits and gas masks they wear...) is assaulted, all because of a government "accident." There are resonances of *Night of the Living Dead* too because family relationships are perverted by the plague. Here a father has sex with his daughter instead of a brother devouring his sister, but the point is the same. A country club replaces a farmhouse as the remote setting of choice, and authorities continue to make fatal mistakes. In *The Crazies*, the military murders a healthy Judy (just as the healthy Ben was shot dead in *Night*). Yet *The Crazies* is an even darker film because there is no dependable way to differentiate hero from villain. The military, though ostensibly trying to help, is the film's biggest danger. The good people of Evans City slip into insanity without any warning or signals, unlike the dead that walk the night in *Living Dead*. Because the line between heroes and villains is blurred, *The Crazies* is also much, much more paranoid than its predecessor. It is a well-made, beautifully shot film, but watching it is not a pleasant experience.

It would be easy (and convenient) to dismiss *The Crazies* as a paranoid "what if" scenario, a playing off of the fear that an overreaching federal government will send soldiers against its own populace, trampling the United States Constitution in the process. But the events of Easter Sunday, 2000, make a viewing of this film a far more sober, far less "fantastic" experience. George Romero's warning about freedom lost in America, if anything, is more timely today than it was in 1973.

Though Vietnam and Richard Nixon are far behind us, here in Miami, today, the government broke into a private residence—

armed—with the intent of righting a wrong. The object of that quest may have been a little boy instead of the “containment” of a plague, but the point of *The Crazies* is that motives do not matter. Once the army is let loose on its own people, a Pandora’s box is opened.

George Romero never makes “easy” or “simple” horror films. His movies are always about something important, whether it be equality among sexes (*Jack’s Wife*), religious persecution (*Martin*), or martial law (*The Crazies*). This film offers some of Romero’s most stylish and meaningful work, and in some ways is a better film than *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) because it gives free reign to its feelings of anarchy. Humor, violence, absurdity and terror co-mingle in a frenetic, but somehow cohesive whole. That balance was overstepped in *Dawn of the Dead* (remember the pie-throwing incident with the zombies and bikers!?) but is revelatory here. *The Crazies* reminds us of an old lesson. It can happen here.

The Creeping Flesh

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (James Hildern); Peter Cushing (Emmanuel Hildern); Lorna Heilbron (Penelope Hildren); Duncan Lamont (Inspector); Kenneth Warren (Lenny); Maurice Bush (Karl).

CREW: *Directed by:* Freddie Francis. *Written by:* Peter Spenceley and Jonathan Rumbold. *Produced by:* Norman Priggen, Tony Tenser, Michael Redbourn. *Director of Photography:* Norman Warwick. *Editor:* Oswald Hafenrichter. *Music:* Paul Ferris. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 94 minutes.

DETAILS: A spectacularly creepy film set in the Victorian era. A prehistoric skeleton found in New Guinea is brought back to malevolent life by that perennial dabbler in mad science, Peter Cushing. A disturbing and moody horror film, buttressed by the presence of Christopher Lee and the experienced directing chops of

Freddie Francis. Chilling.

Don't Look in the Basement (1973) *

Cast & Crew

CAST: William Bill McGhee (Sam); Jessie Lee Fulton (Jane St. Claire); Robert Dracup (Ray Daniels); Harryette Warren (Jennifer); Michael Harvey (Dr. Stephens); Jessie Kirby (Donny); Hugh Feggin (Sgt. Jaffee); Betty Chandler (Allyson); Camilla Carr (Harriett); Gene Ross (Oliver W. Cameron); Anne MacAdams (Dr. Masters); Rosie Holotik (Charlotte Beale); Rhea MacAdams (Mrs. Callingham).

CREW: Camera 2000 Productions in Association with Century Studios Presents *Don't Look in the Basement*. *Cinematographer:* Robert Alcott. *Camera Operator:* Dale Johnson. *Assistant Camera:* David Ceika. *Art Director:* Lynda Pendleton. *Continuity:* L. J. Feagin. *Wardrobe:* Florence Baker. *Make-up:* Jill Esmond. *Production Coordinator:* Annabelle Weenick. *Editor:* Jerry Caraway. *Assistant Editor:* Lynn Lenau. *Unit Manager:* John Jacobie. *Sound:* Edward Motteram. *Special Effects:* Jack Bennett. *Sound Effects:* Brian Hooper. *Location Coordinator:* Joe Eakin, Joe Copeland, Calvin Praytor. *Original Screenplay:* Tim Pope. *Music:* Robert Farrar. *Executive Producer:* Walter L. Krusz. *Color:* Movielab. *Produced and Directed by:* S. F. Brownrigg. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: At the isolated Stephens Sanitarium, a long-time nurse informs a simple-minded inmate, Sam, that she is planning to quit her job. Sam, a once-violent man who now has the mind of a child because of a lobotomy, is upset by the sad news. Meanwhile, another inmate, the Judge, uses an axe to kill Dr. Stephens. Desperate to maintain order, a psychotic patient who believes she is

a doctor (and who calls herself Dr. Geraldine Masters) takes charge of the asylum. Before the departing nurse can leave the asylum, she is murdered.

Later that very night, Charlotte Beale, the sanitarium's new nurse, arrives at the hospital unaware there has been a "change" in administration. She reports to Geraldine Masters, who is still playing at being a psychiatrist. Masters informs Charlotte that Dr. Stephens is dead and that she is changing his administrative objectives. Still, she offers Charlotte a post. That night, Charlotte learns her room is on the same hall with the inmates, and is more than a little disturbed.

The next morning, Dr. Masters and Charlotte review the inmates together. There is Sam, who has the mentality of an 8 year old. Sarge is a military officer who went crazy after losing his platoon in combat. The Judge, formerly of the court of appeals, is a homicidal maniac. Harriet, who believes a doll is a living baby, is facing her own internal trauma. Mrs. Callingham, an old lady, Danny, a mischievous brat, and a nymphomaniac named Allyson make up the remainder of the contingent. Each one of these unfortunate souls was part of Dr. Stephens' experiment to prove that insanity was not a break with reality, but actually a pattern of obsession.

Even as Charlotte becomes familiar with her new wards, Dr. Masters cuts the phone lines so the new arrival cannot communicate with anyone outside the sanitarium. When a phone repairman arrives to fix the line, Allyson accosts him. Later, Dr. Masters murders him.

After an inmate tries to murder her, Charlotte starts to have serious doubts about her career move. Complicating matters, Sam continues to insist that Dr. Stephens is alive and trying to help Charlotte. Charlotte thinks Sam is delusional, but later finds the doctor, half-dead in the basement. Terrified, Charlotte tries to flee the asylum as another coup erupts. The psychotic Masters, a cruel taskmaster, is murdered by the other inmates, many of whom she has wronged.

As Charlotte flees the rural home for the criminally insane, Sam has another break with reality. He goes crazy, and murders all the surviving patients. After the bloody deed is done, he absently gets

an ice pop from the refrigerator and starts to cry like a baby.

COMMENTARY: “Willing suspension of disbelief.” We’ve all heard that term, and we all know what it means. To buy into a movie (and subsequently enjoy it), a viewer must set aside some reservations and just let events happen. However, suspension of disbelief becomes harder the less probable and less realistic a movie seems. Suspension of disbelief becomes downright impossible when a movie blatantly breaks the rules of reality, yet purports to be realistic. *Don’t Look in the Basement* is just such a movie. It is 89 minutes of overacting, implausible plotting, and crazy, irrational tics.

Let us begin with the setting. The Stephens Sanitarium is a rural insane asylum, a two-story house. The film is so badly directed that no sense of location is established. Whose room is where? How many rooms are there? What is the relationship of one room to another? When are we on the first floor? When are we on the second? The asylum exterior is filmed many times, so it is clear that it cannot be a large enough structure to accommodate Charlotte’s absence from the plot for such long stretches of time.

Leaving that issue aside, there are others about the location. Charlotte has just moved in to the house/asylum. Would she not want to know where the nearest grocery store is? Is there a car nearby in case of emergencies? Does nobody, not even a medical supply team, bring equipment, supplies or even groceries to this location? It is simply not easy to believe that this asylum, populated by insane people, is so completely isolated from the rest of the world. Do any of the inmates have relatives that might visit? Psychiatrists? Case workers? It is the kind of asylum that can only exist in a horror film because it is patently unbelievable.

Still, horror movies have survived such ill-conceived settings. One is reminded immediately of *Halloween II* (1981), a movie in which a city hospital was virtually abandoned, and always dark, despite the fact that it was one of the busiest nights of the year. Still, the movie had some tension, and enough reality to just pass muster. *Don’t Look in the Basement* fails its second test of believability by presenting a lead character, Charlotte, who is a total idiot. This woman is supposed to be a trained psychiatric nurse, yet she is not

observant, bright or even very curious.

No alarms ring in her vacant little brain when she learns that there is no lock on her bedroom door, and that the staff of the hospital sleep on the same floor with the murderous patients? In fact, new arrival, Nurse Beale, does not even think to ask which of her new wards was the person who killed Dr. Stephens! One might think that would be an important bit of information, at least for self-protection, if not clinical clarity.

Later, Charlotte is awakened in the middle of the night when a patient, armed with an axe, walks freely in her room and attempts to molest her right there in bed. Though frightened, she doesn't suspect that things are amiss.

Then, finally, when Charlotte realizes something is wrong at the asylum, she bemoans the fact that she cannot escape from the establishment. Why? There are glass windows all around her, on both floors of the building. "BREAK A WINDOW!" one wants to shout at her. Indeed, there is one scene in the film that speaks beautifully to Charlotte's lack of intelligence. She runs breathily to a telephone, picks it up, and realizes it is dead. She looks straight at the telephone handle and says, accusingly, "Why don't you work?" Brilliant.

As for the other characters in *Don't Look in the Basement*, they make Nurse Beale look like a rocket scientist. Dr. Stephens hands a murderous patient an axe, an act that doesn't seem very smart, and thus his subsequent death scene is anticipated rather than unexpected. The actors playing the lunatics all ham it up beyond belief, filling their performances with irrational facial expressions and outbursts of laughter. They are the insane as imagined by a writer who knows nothing about psychology, nothing about human behavior, and nothing about filmmaking.

So, a director has made a terrible movie filled with dumb characters, and a hard-to-swallow "isolated" setting. How does he top it off? Well, at the end of the picture, he can rely on that charming old movie tradition of showing a montage of your cast, along with their names. But, instead of picking out their best moments (as in the closing credits of *Scream*, or *Last House on the*

Left), the director opts to show the cast members bloodied and in pain, reliving their hammy, and bloody death scenes! This must be a first in motion picture history, a totally tasteless way to cap off a totally ridiculous motion picture.

“Get out! Get out and never come back!” warns a little old nutcase in extreme close-up (facing the camera) in one of *Don’t Look in the Basement’s* bizarre, unintentionally humorous moments. That was also this reviewer’s reaction to the videotape as he popped it out of the VCR.

***Don’t Look Now* (1973) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“*Don’t Look Now* does not aim to convert anyone to a belief in the occult; but by the end of the film, even the most skeptical may feel chilled, uneasy, unable to still the doubts and fear stirred in the dark, secret places of the imagination.”—Stephen Farber, *New York Times*: “*Don’t Look Now* Will Scare You—Subtly,” December 23, 1973, pages 147–148.

“...a highly professional piece, more serious than satisfying.... Wintry Venice is the locale ... it has exactly the crypt-like patina called for by such a tale of cloistered terrors. The picture misses in the compounding of its effects; it fails Roeg’s intentions to achieve a delicate balance between montage and muddle.”—Roy Frumkes, *Films in Review*, Volume XXV, Number 1, January 1974, page 49.

“Puzzling, brilliantly detailed and thoroughly absorbing thriller which makes excellent use of its locations and has many thought-provoking passages. A modern-day classic.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 82.

“...the picture is the fanciest, most carefully

assembled Gothic enigma yet put on the screen; it's emblazoned in chic and compared to such Gothics as *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*, it's a masterwork. It's also trash."—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, December 24, 1973, pages 68–69.

"...Roeg successfully plunges us into a formerly peaceful, ordered world now smashed into jagged arcs and shards by sudden pointless death.... It is a tribute to Roeg's artistry that this originally tricky conclusion, like the rest of *Don't Look Now*, can transcend itself, even imperfectly."—Michael Dempsey, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXVII, Number 3, Spring 1974, pages 39, 42, 43.

"...a ghost story for adults. It is a film packed with compelling ideas about time and space, life and death, certainty and doubt. The film offers clues, ideas, associations, and images, but it never provides answers. *Don't Look Now* rewards intellectual curiosity and confounds literary interpretation."—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst, and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 93.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Julie Christie (Laura Baxter); Donald Sutherland (John Baxter); Hilary Mason (Heather); Massimo Serato (Wendy); Clelia Matania (Bishop Barbarrigo); Renato Scarpa (Inspector Longhi); Giorgio Trestini (Workman); Leopoldo Trieste (Hotel Manager); David Tree (Anthony Babbage); Am Rye (Mandy Babbage); Nicholas Salter (Johnny Baxter); Sharon Willkins (Christine Baxter); Bruno Cattaneo (Detective Sabbione); Adelina Poerio (Dwarf).

CREW: A Peter Katz and Anthony B. Unger Production. Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland in

Don't Look Now from a story by Daphne Du Maurier. *Executive Producer:* Anthony B. Unger. *Screenplay:* Alan Scott and Chris Bryant. *Produced by:* Peter Katz. *Directed by:* Nicholas Roeg. *Associate Producer:* Federico Mueller. *Director of Photography:* Anthony Richmond. *Art Director:* Giovanni Socol. *Set Dresser:* Francesco Chinanese. *Film Editor:* Graeme Clifford. *Sound Editor:* Rodney Holland. *Assistant Editors:* Tony Lawson, Peter Holt. *Music:* Pino Donnagio. *Arranged and Conducted by:* Giampiero Boneschi. *Unit Manager:* Franco Coduti. *Assistant Director:* Francesco Cinieri. *Camera Operator:* Luciano Tonti. *Assistant Cameraman:* Simon Ransley. *Sound Recordist:* Peter Davies. *Dub Mixer:* Bob Jones. *Production Accountant:* Terence O'Connor. *Miss Christie's Wardrobe:* Marit Liebersson, Andrea Galer. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Annamalla Fea. *Make-up:* Giancarlo Del Brocco. *Hair-Stylist:* Barry Richardson. *Hairdresser:* Maria Luisa Garbini. *Casting:* Miriam Brickman, Ugo Mariatt. *Continuity:* Rita Agostini. *Gaffer:* Luciano Marrocchi. *Key Grip:* Spartaco Pizzi. *Stunt Coordinator:* Richard Grayden. *Publicity:* Hubert Doyle. *Production Executive:* Steve Previn. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 110 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On a sunny day at their home in England, John and Laura Baxter are shattered when their daughter, Christine, drowns unexpectedly in a backyard pond. Oddly, John seems to have foreknowledge of the tragedy, and races to save his red-slicker-garbed daughter from this terrible accident. Unfortunately, he arrives too late, and Christine dies.

Sometime later, John and Laura go to Venice, where John has been hired to restore a magnificent cathedral. One day, John and Laura run into a blind woman named Heather, and her sister, Wendy. The blind Heather claims to possess psychic powers, or "second sight." She tells the mourning Laura that Christine is still with John and Laura, and that she is happy. Laura faints at this news, and is rushed to a hospital. She tells John about Heather's revelation, and

John is immediately wary of the sisters, fearing some con or “mumbo jumbo.” Still, Laura is happy for the first time since the accident, and she and John make love before an evening out in Venice.

After dinner, they get lost in one of the city’s twisting back alleys and hear a man scream in terror. John glimpses a strange, diminutive figure wearing a red slicker running from the scene, and his suspicion is aroused.

Heather and Wendy meet with Laura on another day, as John continues his assignment at the cathedral. Heather tells Laura that John possesses the gift of second sight too, and that Christine is trying to communicate with him. The sisters ask John to meet with them, but he refuses. Instead, Laura visits their hotel room and watches with horror as Heather experiences a psychic seizure. She warns that John’s life is in danger as long as he remains in Venice. Terrified, Laura wants to leave for England. That night, John and Laura receive a call from their son Johnny’s boarding school that he has been injured in an accident. Laura decides to take the first flight back to England, leaving John in Venice.

After John has sent Laura on her way, he mysteriously spies Laura back in Venice, on a funeral boat—and apparently in mourning—with Heather and Wendy at her side.

While John tries to determine if the sisters have abducted his wife, he sees a corpse pulled out of the Venice canals. This is just another brutal death in a series of murders plaguing the city. Afraid that Laura is somehow in danger, John goes to the police and tells his story to a skeptical Inspector Longhi. The police set out to find Heather and her sister, while simultaneously keeping a tail on John ... who they fear may be their serial killer.

Searching desperately for Laura, John prowls the streets of Venice and again catches a glimpse of a figure in a red slicker. Eventually, John ends up at the sisters’ hotel and learns they have moved. When a desperate John calls home to England he is surprised to discover that Laura is still there, with Johnny, and apparently unharmed. Confused, John tells the police that he made a mistake.

As Laura flies back to Venice, John visits with Heather and takes her to her new hotel, where she meets up with Wendy. When John attempts to leave the hotel, Heather has another seizure and begs John to stay. Frightened, John leaves the hotel and sees the specter in the red slicker again. As he pursues the ghoul, Laura arrives at the hotel, just missing him. In the midst of a dark, fog-ridden night, John pursues the stranger in the red slicker, thinking it to be his dead daughter, Christine. He corners the specter in a dark church chamber but is confronted not with his daughter, but a deformed, monstrous dwarf ... the serial killer of Venice. The diminutive monster slices John's neck with a razor blade, and kills him.

Later, a mourning Laura stands with Heather and Wendy on a funeral boat. When John saw Laura in Venice earlier, he was actually glimpsing the future ... and his own death.

COMMENTARY: The year 1973 brought two landmark films to grateful horror aficionados: William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, and Nicholas Roeg's intense, and disturbing *Don't Look Now*. Both films belong on any critic's ten best horror list for the decade, and both sustain a terrifying world-view. Where *The Exorcist* re-imagines the ancient "evil" of Satan and debunks modern science and medicine in the process, *Don't Look Now* instead posits a frightening world in which the unfathomable hand of fate leads mortals step by step to disaster. The film is especially powerful because director Nicholas Roeg goes to great (and dramatic) lengths to present the lead characters, John Baxter (Donald Sutherland) and Laura Baxter (Julie Christie), as likable, tender and identifiable human beings.

Horror movies are always more powerful when populated by characters the audience cares about, and *Don't Look Now* focuses strongly on the relationship and intimacy of its two primaries. This focus is well-placed because the last ten minutes of the film, in which the lines of fate finally converge, are all the more shattering since the audience has come to love the film's leads.

How does a director forge so powerful a link between character and viewer? In *Don't Look Now*, Nicholas Roeg aggressively marshals formalist film technique, particularly crosscutting, to build to that very effect. Early in the film, Laura and John Baxter make love in their hotel room. Instead of merely "recording" that sensuous

experience, Roeg cross-cuts the intense love-making with a lyrical period of post-coital “dressing up,” in which a satisfied John and Laura prepare for their night out in Venice.

By seeing the couple acting intimately, not just sexually, but in their own “space” together, the audience catches the characters in the act of being human. Roeg’s camera watches them undressing, bathing, experiencing their own nakedness (sometimes with modesty, as when John runs across the maid and is embarrassed by his lack of dress), and even sharing laughs. Their sex scene, though erotic, is also remarkably tender. It begins with a simple, gentle touch, and then escalates, slowly, into outright passion. There’s something very right and very natural about the pacing and shooting of this sequence, and the sex scene never feels forced, arty, or artificially “erotic” (like the overblown sex-capades of a film such as *Basic Instinct* [1991]). It all takes place on a far more human playing field and the act of getting dressed together after sex importantly follows one act of intimacy with another.

And, by crosscutting future time (dressing and getting ready for dinner) with present time (sexual intercourse), the lovemaking scene defies movie sex-scene convention. It does not build up to sexual gratification and orgasm as most filmed sexual encounters would. Instead, the crosscutting of the sexual present with the post-sex future takes the crescendo and the “build up” out of the sexual equation. This is appropriate because it is the intimacy of sex, not the final ejaculation and orgasm, that is important to director Roeg in this case.

He wants us to experience the lovemaking with the couple as a moment shared, not an appetite sated. It’s as if we’re suddenly privy to flashes of a real person’s life, and the sex scene creates empathy in the audience for these characters. We have experienced a sensitive moment with this couple, as well as a tragedy (the death of their child, Christine), and that is a one-two punch of “likeability” that propels the audience, unwittingly into the horror that comes next. The sex scene played against those romantic preparations for a night out is touching rather than vulgar, emotional rather than merely lustful.

The juxtaposition of intimacies in the sex scene is part of the overall

film's *modus operandi* as well. Roeg is constantly juxtaposing like and unlike moments in *Don't Look Now* to suggest a connection, or disconnect, in the hands of fate. The first scene of the film is positively pastoral, for instance. A child (Christine) plays carelessly near a pond on a dewy green morning. An orange sun hangs lazily in the background, and the girl is seen wearing a red slicker. Just yards away, inside the house, Christine's father gazes at a slide of a church interior. He spies someone sitting in a pew, wearing a similar red slicker. What's the connection? Why has one image bled into the other?

This "overlap" or coincidence happens, quite literally. When Christine falls into the water, John simultaneously spills his drink on the slide, and in both situations the person in the slicker (either in reality or image) is "drowned" in wetness. Is this part of John's second sight, or merely a connection that the "world" is aware of, but which the human characters are not? How can John know that his daughter is dying, and that she will die in a way that eventually leads him to his own death? It seems random, but the crosscutting suggests it is not at all random, but by some strange design. The hands of fate are operating to a purpose, but as human beings, we do not understand the mechanism or the purpose.

Similarly, fate conspires to keep Laura and John apart as the end of his life draws near. Why? Why should he end up on the exact street with the ghoulish serial killer at that one moment of time? Why should Laura always be one step behind him, unable to reach him or save him? Why should John die at the hands of a malevolent troll who, in passing, seems to resemble the daughter he misses so very much? There are no answers to these questions in *Don't Look Now*, and the audience is left to feel that though there is an order to the universe, it is one that John has only barely glimpsed.

When John dies, images flash in front of the camera: images of life and death, of love and fear, of pain and joy. His death is pointless, but for John his death represents a moment, a summit, of understanding. The tangle of images in this montage suggest that this is how it was *meant* to be. By design. Every blind corner, every misstep, led John directly to this moment, and to the razor blade of that dwarf. It was preordained, decided long ago, and John fulfilled

his role in it all, unconsciously.

Don't Look Now is a terrifying film because it is all about the connections in our lives, connections that we either see or fail to see. Why should the dwarf look mysteriously like a gargoyle on the cathedral John is renovating? Why should the dead girl and the serial killer both wear a red slicker? Why are the sisters, Heather and Wendy, seen to be laughing maniacally in a moment alone? Why should John experience a vision of the future, a warning, that instead leads him straight to his own demise? These questions are not answered, but as John's life flashes before his eyes, there is a feeling of synthesis and calm following the shock and surprise of his murder.

Unlike the rest of us, John has found his answers at last. He knows why bad things happen to good people ... but, like all those who leave this mortal coil, he cannot share the secret with the rest of us. Again, we are cut off from the answers we desire.

Set in Venice, a frightening city of "too many shadows," that's like a "dinner party where the guests are all dead," *Don't Look Now* not only makes the most of the city's twisted alleyways, it actually mirrors them. Like Venice, *Don't Look Now* is a labyrinth with dead ends, false starts, and circles. Like Venice, life seems in this film to be a cruel trick in which there is no direct route to answers, or any sense of clarity. The final revelatory shot of the film—a dwarf hidden in the corner, monstrous and horrifying—is as much a question as an answer. What is this thing? Where did it come from? Why does it kill? Who is it? What is it? There are no answers, only the end of a human life. But there is also terror in this not knowing.

It is a profound terror more akin to that in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) than to that in *The Exorcist*. The final moment, when the stranger in the slicker is revealed, remains one of horror's most terrifying and powerful images, even today. It is terrifying because, all at once, it makes sense *and* fails to make sense. On a purely subconscious level, we understand what it is. On a rational, daylight level, the existence of this ... thing, is too much to contemplate. We want it to be a child, somehow brought back from the dead, but instead it is a twisted reflection of us, a monster delivered to us by the hand of fate.

Don't Look Now is a perfect title for this film. In that final revelatory moment, the film's title warns the audience to hide. If you look, if you watch, all your fears about life and death, and the connections in your life, will be validated. Even the nicest people will meet the grim reaper one day, and the form of that reaper, as in our worst nightmares, will make sense and fail to make sense at the same time. Chilling.

***The Exorcist* (1973) * * * ***

Critical Reception

"This is the most scary picture I've seen in years.... The acting, the lighting, the soundtrack, and above all, the special effects have been ordered up carefully by the director and used precisely. Even the music is faultless.... During most horror pictures that I see, I keep watching how it's done.... Here the directorial hand is quicker than the eyes; the ears. Here I got frights and the pleasure of unmediated visceral response. Disbelief was canted, if not suspended. And virtually all of this was Friedkin's doing.... *The Exorcist* will scare the hell out of you."—Stanley Kauffmann, *New Republic*, February 9, 1974, page 23.

"If movies are, among other things, the opportunities for escapism, then *The Exorcist* is one of the most powerful ever made.... During the movie there are no reservations, but only experiences. We feel shock, horror, nausea, fear, and some small measure of dogged hope.... *The Exorcist* is one of the best movies of its type ever made; it not only transcends the genre of terror, horror, and the supernatural, but it transcends such serious, ambitious efforts in the same direction as Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*."—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 204.

“...a terrifying motion picture.... Friedkin’s direction is expert: he has left much of the filmic excitement to supervising editor Jordan Leondopoulos, who emphasizes the struggle between good and evil ... the horror film will never be the same.”—C.P.R., *Films in Review*, Volume XXV, Number 2, February 1974.

“...an exceedingly well-made bad picture. It invokes snobbish admiration of people rich enough to own a Mercedes and a butler, it denigrates medicine and psychiatry, it involves the Catholic Church in mumbo jumbo and, by grotesque make-up and camera trickery ... it turns a 12-year-old girl into a spectacle of loathsome ugliness for the sole purpose of mindless entertainment. It should be scorned, and when it opened every critic I read did indeed scorn it.”—Robert Hatch, *Nation*, February 2, 1974, page 157.

“...the movie is vile and brutalizing.... Von Sydow has a presence of unshadowed strength. Jason Miller ... makes a very impressive first film appearance with a performance full of swift undercurrents of psychic pain. Linda Blair performs bravely as the tormented girl; the rasping voice of her demon is hauntingly dubbed.... Ellen Burstyn, a good actress who is especially adept at portraying beleaguered strength is stuck here with an assignment that might have once suited Fay Wray: look hysterical and scream. The role, alas, is the very essence of *The Exorcist*.”—Jay Cocks, *Time Magazine*, January 14, 1974, page 38.

“...the trash bombshell of 1973, the aesthetic equivalent of being run over by a truck ... a gloating, ugly exploitation picture, a costlier cousin of those ghoulish cheapies released in drive-ins and fleapits almost weekly in major American cities.”—Michael Dempsey, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXVII,

Number 4, Summer 1974, pages 39, 42, 43.

"Instead of characters we are not exactly given caricatures; the figures on screen strike me more as witnesses whose main task is simply to stand attentively at bay, observing the weird and unnatural events in the Georgetown house.... In lieu of developed plot we get what Aristotle called 'spectacle,' unadulterated and unrelenting depiction of the horrible ... despite the movie's obvious flaws, it possesses undeniable power to shock."—Robert F. Willson, Jr. *Journal of Popular Film: "The Exorcist and Multicinema Aesthetics,"* Volume 3, Number 2, 1974, page 183.

"*The Exorcist* is the kind of movie you get when you leave religion to screenwriters and businessmen."—Eugene Kennedy, priest and professor of psychology at Loyola, *New York Times*, August 4, 1974, page 4.

"Blatty's 'problem of good' treatise gave the big-budget treatment to horror, and as a canvas for provocative scares, has never really been equalled. Today, it's kind of slow moving and a little overblown, but it certainly shows how we longed for some spiritual healing after the chaotic 1960s. Best moments: the nearly subliminal flashing 'Death mask' appearing for a split second during Karras's dream and once during a possession scene."—Bill Latham, *Mary's Monster*, Powys Books.

"Director Friedkin treats his subject very seriously, wrapping us up in the lore of demonology and scrupulously taking us through the process of the exorcism. Unexpected shocks—such as the sudden close-up of the spinal tap—wear us down and weaken our resistance towards the confrontations that we do expect. The story is compelling, the acting first-rate, the pacing taut, and the shocks original. The acting and the script lift *The Exorcist*

to a level beyond standard horror.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, the Worst, the Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 82.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ellen Burstyn (Chris MacNeil); Max Von Sydow (Father Merrin); Lee J. Cobb (Lt. Kinderman); Kitty Winn (Sharon); Jack MacGowran (Burke Dennings); Jason Miller (Father Karras); Linda Blair (Regan); Mercedes McCambridge (the Voice of Evil). Reverend William O'Malley, S.J., Barton Heyman, Peter Masterson, Rudolf Schundler, Gina Petrushka, Robert Symonds, Arthur Storch, Reverend Thomas Birmingham, S.J., Vasiliki Maliaros, Titos Vandis, Wallace Rooney, Ron Faber, Donna Mitchell, Roy Cooper, Robert Geringer.

CREW: A William Friedkin Film of William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*. *Directed by:* William Friedkin. *Written by:* William Peter Blatty (based on his novel). *Executive Producer:* Noel Marshall. *Associate Producer:* David Salven. *Director of Photography:* Owen Roizman. *Make-up artist:* Dick Smith. *Special Effects:* Marcel Vercoutere. *Production Designer:* Billy Malley. *First Assistant Director:* Terence A. Donnelly. *Set Decorator:* Jerry Wunderlich. *Music:* Mike Oldfield (Tubular Bells), Hans Werner Henze (Fantasia for Strings). *Additional Music:* Jack Nitzsche. *Director of Photography (Iraq Sequence):* Billy Williams. *Production Manager:* William Kaplan. *Sound:* Jean-Louis Ducarme. *Film Editor:* Bud Smith. *Assistant Film Editor:* Ross Levy. *Supervising Film Editor:* Jordan Leondopoulos. *Film Editors:* Evan Lottman, Norman Gay. *Assistant Film Editors:* Michael Goldman, Craig McKay, Jonathan Pontell. *Sound:* Chris Newman. *Dubbing Mixer:* Buzz Knudson. *Sound Special Effects:* Fred Brown, Ross Taylor. *Special Sound Effects:* Ron Nagle, Doc Siegel,

Gonzalo Gavira, Bob Fine. *Sound Consultant*: Hal Landaker. *Music Editor*: Gene Marks. *Property Master*: Joe Laracciollo. *Script Supervisor*: Nick Sgarro. *Costume*: Joe Fretwell. *Hairstylist*: Bill Farley. *Casting*: Nessa Hyams, Juliet Taylor, Louise D. Giamo. *Assistant Art Director*: Charles Bailey. *Technical Advisors*: Reverend John Nicola, Reverend Thomas Bermingham, Reverend William O'Malley, Norman E. Chase, MD., Herbert F. Walker, MD., Arthur I. Snyder, MD. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 122 minutes.

P.O.V.

“*The Exorcist* goes back to a case of alleged demon possession that I heard about in 1949 when I was a junior at George Washington University—not an overly credulous and pious account from medieval times. This was in a sophisticated capital city, with psychiatric experts in attendance”¹⁸.—Author/producer William Peter Blatty recounts his inspiration for *The Exorcist* (1973).

“A psychiatrist friend of mine has told me that he is seeing new patients all the time whose troubles can be directly traced to their having seen this film. They report recurring nightmares and problems they never had before. My friend is concerned, as I am, that there will be even more of it, if people continue to flock to the box office”¹⁹.—The Reverend Billy Graham denounces *The Exorcist*.

SYNOPSIS: In Northern Iraq, a Catholic priest, Father Merrin, participates in a massive archeological dig. As he works at the site, he unearths a tiny statue buried in the dirt, one with the face of a mythical demon. This discovery, coupled with some bizarre incidents, affects Merrin deeply and he plans to return stateside, though he is hampered in part by his weak heart.

Meanwhile, movie star Chris MacNeil shoots a movie for director

Burke Dennings in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. She is renting a house with her 12-year-old daughter, Regan, and lives in the chi-chi world of movie star celebrity; she is troubled when strange noises are heard in her attic. Before long, cute little Regan also has an unusual experience. She has been playing with a Ouija board, and contacts a spirit called "Captain Howdy." To Regan and Chris, this event is only part of a silly child's game, but it is to be the catalyst for terror.

One night at a party, Regan walks downstairs long after her bedtime and warns a visiting astronaut that he will die "up there" on his next visit to space. Then, as if for punctuation, she urinates on the carpet. Chris is concerned, though Regan's odd behavior is first dismissed as a case of "nerves." Before long, the strange behavior intensifies, and Regan is taken to see a doctor for her shocking descents into obscenity and violence.

At first the doctor suspects a chemical disturbance, a lesion, in Regan's temporal lobe, but X-rays reveal no signs of a seizure disorder. Regan suffers through a battery of painful medical tests, but medicine completely fails to diagnose her condition.

The last straw occurs when Chris finds a bloody Regan masturbating with a crucifix. Regan's physical appearance and voice have changed too: she seems to be inhabited by another, monstrous creature. Worse, she commands inexplicable powers, including the ability to hurl furniture around the room by power of thought.

Before long, there is also a suspicion that Regan somehow managed to kill Burke Dennings. A local police detective, Lt. Kinderman, visits Chris, and questions how a girl Regan's size could hurtle an adult man out her bedroom window and down the long flight of stairs outside.

At a loss to explain Regan's condition, the medical community recommends psychiatry. A prominent psychiatrist informs Chris that Regan may have a split personality, but even that answer does not explain Regan's strange and horrifying transformation into a monster. The psychiatrist attempts to hypnotize Regan, but the child grabs him by the testicles, and attacks him. Later, a panel of psychologists recommends to Chris that her daughter be committed.

When Chris refuses, the same panel offers another suggestion: *religion*.

Specifically, Regan needs to be “exorcised” of the demon that has possessed her. Though Chris is shocked that learned men of science and medicine have recommended the approach of a “witch doctor,” she realizes an exorcism may be her last opportunity to save Regan.

Chris seeks out Father Karras, a psychologist and Jesuit priest. Karras is struggling with his own demons, of a different variety. His old mother recently died, and Karras feels partially responsible. He did not look in on her during her last hours, and it was days before her corpse was discovered. Struggling with issues of faith, Karras agrees to see Regan, but as a psychologist, not a priest. He meets with her, and a close analysis of Regan’s speech reveals that she is speaking English in reverse. Regan even volunteers that she is actually “the Devil.” Karras comes to believe this terrible fact when Regan miraculously reveals knowledge of his dead mother, and the words “help me” appear carved on the girl’s belly!

Karras goes to the Catholic Church to request an exorcism, and after some initial resistance, is able to secure the talents of Father Merrin, the wizened priest who recently returned from Iraq. One dark night, Merrin arrives at the MacNeil house to do the job. With Karras assisting him, Merrin prepares to battle the Devil. However, even the experienced Merrin is unprepared for the array of evil tricks he soon witnesses. The demon inhabiting Regan proceeds to levitate off the bed, projectile vomit a foul green substance, and spin Regan’s head 360 degrees.

Arguing that “the Power of Christ” compels the demon to vacate Regan’s innocent vessel, Merrin continues the exorcism. Unfortunately, his weak heart gives out, and Merrin dies before the battle is won.

Alone now, Karras confronts Regan and the demon within her one more time. As she taunts him with the knowledge that his “mother sucks cocks in Hell” and other atrocities, Karras abandons the Bible and grows dangerously physical, even throttling the girl madly. Karras finally tells the demon to “take him,” and the monster obliges. The demon flees Regan and possesses Karras, but in a last

moment of humanity the priest summons the will to throw himself out the nearest window. He plunges down the long flight of stairs outside, and dies, taking the evil with him.

In time, Regan recovers from her ordeal, and the MacNeils leave Georgetown for good. A thoughtful Father Dyer, friend to Father Karras and priest to the MacNeils, gazes at the staircase where good and evil collided, and ponders the nature of man, and existence itself.

COMMENTARY: Although such pronouncements are notoriously difficult to prove, not to mention highly contentious, it hardly seems an exaggeration to state that *The Exorcist* is the greatest horror film of the 1970s, and indeed, perhaps the greatest genre picture ever produced. The key to the film's artistic success rests in the unique collaboration of two artists, writer William Peter Blatty, and director William Friedkin. Blatty's story is a literate template, even-handedly contemplating the hierarchy of the universe (and the existence of God). And Friedkin's studied approach to this material is nearly revolutionary. Instead of straining to shock and jolt audiences throughout the picture with exploitative effects and "bumps," Friedkin assumes the perspective of observer, almost a documentarian. Thus, when he is finally ready to release the shock effects (in the final act of the picture), they are not only disconcerting, but terrifying.

The Exorcist opens in Iraq, and were the picture made today, this entire scene would no doubt be excised as being irrelevant and too slow. Yet, as Friedkin understands, the preamble to the action in Georgetown sets up the film's debate about the nature of human existence and the universe. The picture opens with a black-and-white view of the sun that quickly fades into a deep orange. This shot might be seen as a metaphor for the picture's view of the world. This isn't a typical "black-and-white" horror film with easy answers, but rather a full-blooded, colorful examination of questions that humans have yet to fully answer. In the opening shot, *The Exorcist* leaves behind the tradition of *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Wolfman* (1941) and their ilk by going further, and deeper, into what it means to be human, and what it means to be scared. The shedding of black and white is a visual cue

that genre traditions have been cast off.

From that provocative opening, the picture instantly achieves vast scope as Friedkin's camera prowls a colossal archeological dig, and focuses on Father Merrin's discovery of a small statue. The slow-moving camera, the tracking shots, the inscrutable faces of Iraqi extras, and the heavy focus on authentic locations establish immediately the reality of this world. It might as well be a travelogue, for the narrative is clearly secondary to the exploration of place. Viewers are discomforted not because of special effects or depictions of monsters, but because this world seems unsettling and alien. Father Merrin is outside the safety of America, and outside the shelter of his religious beliefs. The statue he discovers, that of some ancient Middle Eastern icon, either a demon or a god, raises further doubt in the audience. What is it? What does it represent? Was it buried for a reason, and has some ancient evil been unearthed by its discovery?



Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) prepares to vomit pea soup during

a confrontation in *The Exorcist* (1973).

Interestingly, there is no linear narrative here informing us that Merrin is a priest on sabbatical, searching a dig, recovering from his previous brush with evil. That information is all projected backwards, from an understanding fostered later in the film, and for the time being, the audience is left with a simple, but disturbing picture: an old priest finding a mystery in the dirt. The conjunction of foreign detail, and audience uncertainty about the narrative's direction, creates a strange tension, an uneasiness that escalates throughout the film.

To Friedkin's credit, the sounds and sights of Iraq are recorded by his camera without the bias of overt formalism. In film, there are two schools concerning approach: the formalistic and the realistic. In the realistic vein, the camera merely records action, letting audiences draw conclusions. In the formalist school, the camera expresses something, whether it is emotion, perception, or implication. *The Exorcist* is so effective because Friedkin artfully blends these approaches. The film reads as mostly realistic (with documentary-style excursions to Iraq and a modern American hospital), with bursts of the formalistic (the Georgetown bedroom climax) injected to chill the blood. The opening prologue is realistic, and it leaves enough psychic "space" for viewers to form their opinions about what is being depicted and suggested on-screen. This is critical, for the audience will receive no solid answers about the events that follow, only competing theories. Nobody ever knows or understands why Regan is chosen to be the vessel of evil, but questions raised throughout *The Exorcist* lead viewers to glean and synthesize their own understanding based on the totality of Friedkin's images. It is as close to artistic as a horror film ever gets (except, perhaps, *Don't Look Now*), and the critical backlash against *The Exorcist* may have resulted simply because critics were unwilling to accept Friedkin's artistic approach in that most reviled of dark horses: a genre film.

Here, for once, was a horror film to be taken seriously, to be examined rigorously, and most critics at the time simply weren't up to the task. They didn't go into a horror movie expecting so high a level of discourse (and so effectively scary a film), and most critics,

disturbed by what they felt and experienced, termed the film debauched. Art in the service of the vulgar, or so they argued. As time has proven, they missed the boat.

The second interlude of realism in *The Exorcist* is perhaps more effective even than the prologue in Iraq. It finds the audience accompanying Regan and her mother to a metropolitan, state-of-the-art hospital in America. There, in excruciating detail, the film details Regan's battery of "medical tests." We watch in shock and disgust as she receives a hypodermic in her neck, then dye in her veins. We see her blood spurt out as a tube is capped in her throat, and we watch with horror as arcane, vibrating machinery has its way with the girl.

Again, it is important to note that this scene is not constructed in the manner most horror directors would, no doubt, assume. There are few close-ups of grimacing faces, or bloody tools. This isn't the autopsy scene of *Alien*³ (1992), where bloody bone saws and scalpels are observed in extreme, discordant close-up. Instead, these procedures and their participants are all viewed by the auspices of restrained long shot. The camera pointedly does not *express* the horror of Regan's experience with modern medicine, it only *records* it, allowing the audience to take away from it what it will. Indeed, the medical procedures are horrifying enough that they do not require any tainting or shading of any type whatsoever.

In some ways, the hospital interlude is the most horrifying scene in the film because it looks, sounds and feels totally real. The audience is at the hospital with Regan and her mother, looking through the observation glass as a spinal tap and other procedures are performed with clinical detachment. For a time, it is medicine that possesses Regan, not the Devil, it seems.

In discussing a film like this, it is often rewarding to look at the choices the director didn't make. For instance, is it truly necessary to *The Exorcist's* narrative to depict these scenes of medical torture? *Not really*. It might all have been accomplished with a short scene in which a doctor announces that the tests on Regan are complete. But Friedkin again plays the role of documentarian, escorting the audience inside a modern hospital, and exposing its procedures, step by methodical step. He need not comment on the horror; this

plain recording of it is enough to be unsettling. Sympathy for Regan and her mother is evinced, and that's an important point. Another is clearly that modern medicine is cold, de-humanizing, out of touch, and inefficient. These monstrous tests result, after all, in no insight into the problem. Even the "best" of 20th century technology and know-how cannot save this girl from evil.

Much has been made of the sequence in which the physicians refer Chris to the psychiatrists, and then finally recommend she seek out religion. In other words, science fails utterly to help Regan. This doubt and concern about man's knowledge is the factor that most distinctly marks *The Exorcist* as a film of the 1970s. At the time of *The Exorcist*, America was still at war (in Vietnam), Richard Nixon was fighting scandal (Watergate), crime was skyrocketing, an energy crisis was looming, and there seemed to be no answers for any of these considerable problems. In a nutshell, the world seemed to be going to Hell in a hand-basket, and Americans were openly wondering, perhaps for the first time in the country's history, if their know-how and ingenuity was capable of leading them out of the darkness. The old answers, those of philosophy and religion, seemed to carry a new meaning, a new validity even, because pillars like science, government, and technology were exposed as failures. It is no wonder that Ronald Reagan won the presidency in 1980. A simple, optimistic man, he appealed to America's deep need to believe in itself again. Here was a man who championed simple, "traditional" values, like good and evil, good guys and bad guys, and that basic characteristic encouraged Americans, who had seen a decade of doubt and self-recriminations. The conservative 1980s were a backlash against the more open, more provocative 1970s.

The Exorcist is, perhaps, the ultimate film of the 1970s because it so accurately reflects the temperature of the times. It acknowledges the uncertainty of its era, and anticipating the 1980s, it leads the nation back to a consideration of the basics. Forget science, technology, psychiatry and the other "bullshit"—what finally saves Regan in the end of Friedkin's film is a rite of exorcism ... a *religious* ritual.

For that reason, the religious backlash against *The Exorcist* is

especially hard to comprehend. There has rarely been a more moral, more overtly religious film. Reading it in its most simple forms, the film re-affirms the Christian belief that the universe is separated into forces of good and evil. The Church is even seen in a mostly positive light (the dedicated Father Merrin, the hip Father Dyer, the brilliant Father Karras).

On another, equally simple level, *The Exorcist* is about a priest who loses faith, discovers evil is real, and recovers that faith. What's for the Church not to like there? Or, is the notion that there might not be a God simply something that religious zealots find unacceptable, and therefore worthy of censorship and dismissal?

Leaving religion behind, the fear that is ultimately being expressed so effectively in *The Exorcist* is one about the future. If technology, science, medicine, government and other so-called human authorities are ineffective, what possible future can exist? It is no accident then that *The Exorcist* is about a child in distress, for children, more than anything else in the human spectrum, clearly represent the future. Without children, our traditions don't continue. Without children, the human race dies. Some conservatives, including ultra-right wing author David Frum (*How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life—For Better or Worse*) have read *The Exorcist* as a diatribe against children, stating that it represents a rampant fear of the time: a fear of having children and maintaining family. He even rattles off statistics about how birth rates were down in the 1970s (a factor on which he blames women, liberals and abortions...). Yet, as is so typical for these cultural warriors, he has misread the facts regarding an entertainment. *The Exorcist* is not afraid of children, it is afraid *for* children. Reading the film purely on a social level (again, not representing the totality of the film's artistry), this is a movie in which a mother loses her child to evil influences, and the pillars of community (including science, medicine and psychology) are useless. What helps? *Religion*. Pure and simple.

The Exorcist sees an order in the universe beyond the vicissitudes of '70s life and technology. Furthermore, it believes that order may be all that can save children. Taken on the most extreme terms, one could even argue that Regan is metaphorically possessed by the

disco decade. She suddenly has knowledge of and interest in sex (a result of the decade's sexual liberation?), her language grows coarse, and she abandons "right" principles. She is only cured when she is again re-acquainted with religion ... by force.

In the preceding paragraphs, one can read and analyze how technique (realism injected into a traditionally formalist genre) and theme (the nature of evil, fear of the future, *et cetera*), combine to create a memorable horror film. What few words can adequately express is the sense of growing terror so palpably generated in *The Exorcist*. The unsettling (Iraq, the death of Karras' mother) builds to the disturbing (Regan's urinating, her experience at the hospital), to terrifying (the bedroom set piece) with such confidence that there are few opportunities for reservations. By building slowly to the head spins and the pea soup regurgitation, *The Exorcist* achieves its effects with absolute legitimacy. All the right questions are asked (is this a mental illness?), and all the right notes are hit, particularly in Karras' subplot, which sees him struggling with issues of faith.

Ultimately, history writes its own reviews. Today, any discussion of *The Exorcist* immediately conjures images of Linda Blair masturbating with a crucifix, spitting up pea soup, or spinning her head 360 degrees. Those were all shocking and stunning moments in 1973, and they remain so today, but in a sense these special effects triumphs mean less to the film than the opening in Iraq, or that visit to the hospital. The bedroom mechanics and pyrotechnics, though terrifying and well orchestrated, are only the icing on a very satisfying cake. They punctuate the horror, but would serve no purpose had not Friedkin opted to take every moment in the film seriously, and bring his considerable knowledge of film technique and mood to bear on the project. Most films are lucky to have one intellect calling the shots, but *The Exorcist* has two, Friedkin and Blatty, and they have combined to create one of the great cinema experiences of the 20th century.

One of the most memorable images in horror cinema comes early in *The Exorcist*. Father Merrin, in Iraq, gazes at a giant statue of a gargoyle or demon. In one frame, there is both good (Merrin), and evil (the statue), and a gulf between them. It is in that gulf that most of us probably dwell, between the worst and best impulses of

our human nature. *The Exorcist* is a great, and important, film because it makes viewers imagine that there may be something greater outside us: an order beyond that which we perceive in our daily lives. Any horror film that can make an atheist stop and really wonder about God is a wonder itself, and *The Exorcist* does just that. It accomplishes this task not with bells and whistles (as most critics argue) but with its persistent intelligence, and its conjunction of the realistic with the formalistic. Ultimately all horror films are about the human condition, and man's place in the universe. *The Exorcist* is the best of this genre because it does not tiptoe around that fact, but confronts it head on. The uncertainty it leaves in viewers is the uncertainty of our very lives.

LEGACY: Despite a series of critical assaults from all sides, *The Exorcist* went on to become the highest grossing moneymaker of all time (a title taken away two years later, when *Jaws* premiered). The film was so successful that it not only spawned two sequels, the mediocre *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) and the decent, Blatty-directed *Exorcist III: Legion* (1990), but a host of horrific and horrible progeny. *Abby* (1974) was a blaxploitation spin on the material, *Beyond the Door* (1975), an Italian spin-off, *House of Exorcism* (1976), another Italian botch-job, and so on. *The Exorcist* spawned a new wave not only of "possession" films, but Devil-oriented supernatural horror pictures such as *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976), *The Omen* (1976), and *The Manitou* (1978).

As a result of her head-spinning performance in Friedkin's film, young Linda Blair immediately became a superstar before fading to obscurity. Her other horror credits include *A Stranger in Our House*, a 1978 TV movie directed by Wes Craven, *Hell Night* (1982) and *Re-Possessed* (1989), in which she spoofed the film that made her a success. Blair also had a cameo in *Scream* (1996).

Today, *The Exorcist* is recognized as a classic of the horror genre, and few viewers remember how caustic the reviews were more than twenty-five years ago. The film was re-released with new footage in 2000 as *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen*, and it was the top-horror grosser of the year.

Critical Reception

“One of those neatly constructed but slightly mechanical psycho-thrillers which makes you feel as if someone is pushing buttons connected to electrodes in your brain... There is a sporadically effective use of prowling camera movements and atmospheric sounds, but Hammer fans will soon recognize the plot as a thinly disguised reworking of *A Taste of Fear*....”—Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 291.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Judy Geeson (Peggy); Joan Collins (Molly Carmichael); Ralph Bates (Robert); Peter Cushing (the Headmaster/Michael Carmichael); James Cossins, Brian Grellins, Gillian Lind (Mrs. Beamish), John Bown.

CREW: A Hammer Production. *Production Supervisor:* Roy Skaggs. *Production Manager:* Christopher Neame. *Assistant Director:* Ted Morley. *Continuity:* Gladys Goldsmith. *Casting:* James Liggat. *Director of Photography:* Arthur Grant. *Camera Operator:* Neil Binney. *Make-up:* Bill Partleton. *Hairdresser:* Helen Lennox. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Rosemary Burrow. *Art Director:* Don Picton. *Set Dresser:* Penny Struthers. *Construction Manager:* Bill Greene. *Editor:* Peter Weatherley. *Sound Recordist:* Claude Hitchcock. *Sound Editor:* Ron Hyde. *Dubbing Recordist:* Denis Whitlock. *Recording Director:* Tony Lumkin. *Music:* John McCabe. *Musical Supervision:* Philip Martell. *Screenplay:* Jimmy Sangster, Michael Syson. *Produced and Directed by:* Jimmy Sangster. A Hammer Production Made at Elstree Studios, Hertfordshire, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On the eve of her departure to live at an exclusive boys school of 150 with her husband, a young newlywed, Peggy, is attacked in her apartment by a shadowy figure with a prosthetic arm. Her bizarre story is dismissed by the kindly landlady, Mrs. Beamish, because Peggy recently recovered from a nervous breakdown, and still doubts her full recovery. Peggy's husband, Bob, dismisses the attack too, and takes Peggy away from London, to their new haunts.

Peggy and Bob's cottage stands on the grounds of an exquisite, though strangely isolated and quiet school. Not long after their arrival on campus, Peggy thinks she sees someone standing outside her window. The next day, she explores the vast school on her own, and meets Michael Carmichael, the creepy headmaster. Even more strangely, the school appears abandoned, though Peggy distinctly hears the voices of young men emanating from various chambers. On her return home, Peggy is attacked by the same assailant, and Bob still refuses to believe her.

The next morning, Peggy meets Molly Carmichael, the headmaster's bitchy wife (and splendid sharpshooter...). Immediate dislike arises between the two women, but Peggy is more disturbed by the fact that Bob must return to London for an overnight conference ... leaving her alone at the cottage. Peggy's fears are justified, and that very night, she confronts an intruder downstairs, shooting him. Surprised, Peggy discovers her assailant is Michael, the headmaster! Carmichael is miraculously uninjured by the bullet, and pursues Peggy out of the cabin into the quiet, dark school. There, Peggy corners herself in a dormitory room and fires her weapon again, but strangely, Carmichael keeps coming...

When Bob returns from London, he finds Peggy in a near catatonic state, and then sets about to find evidence that she has killed Carmichael. When he cannot find such proof, Bob tells Peggy an odd story. Bob claims that the school has not been occupied since 1963, when a fire killed several students and cost Mr. Carmichael his arm. Bob, it turns out, was Carmichael's medical caregiver after the incident, and he came to like the bizarre headmaster. Now, Michael prowls the school alone (with his mechanical arm...), teaching and lecturing to a group of boys who only exist as voices

on audio tape recordings.

What Bob fails to tell Peggy is that he and Molly Carmichael are lovers, and that he has arranged everything, including his marriage to the unstable Peggy, to get rid of Michael and inherit the headmaster's wife and money. The only problem is that Michael's body cannot be found, so Bob and Molly set out to torture Peggy into "confessing" her crime, and revealing where she hid the headmaster's body. The tables turn unexpectedly when the headmaster turns out to be very much alive, and in league with Peggy to stop the conspirators from completing their nasty little plan.

COMMENTARY: The clichés fly fast and thick in *Fear in the Night*, a "psychological" Hammer Studios film that relies on some of the hoariest horror ideas imaginable. Despite the reliance on age-old material, the film is enjoyable, and supported by a dream B-movie cast including (you already know, don't you?) Peter Cushing, the beautiful Judy Geeson, and "super bitch" Joan Collins.

Fear in the Night is immediately reminiscent of *Diabolique*, and its title might more accurately have been *Let's Scare Peggy to Death*. The film trots out the old clichés of the genre including (in no particular order): the secret lovers, the disbelieving husband, the woman with a history of mental problems, and the "crime from the past" (in this case, 1963). Despite such threadbare material, there is an interesting sexual undercurrent to the film, and director Sangster keeps surprise in the air as long as humanly possible considering the derivative nature of the material.

Fear in the Night starts with a pan across a field, as leaves blow across it. We then see the abandoned school that is the film's central setting, and experience a feeling of isolation and foreboding. Then the soundtrack broadcasts eerie sing-songy young voices lifted in song, as the camera probes the gym, the dining room, the bunk room, et cetera ... all mysteriously devoid of life. It's a strange tour of a seemingly haunted or perhaps cursed place, and the (effective) punctuation to the montage is a view of a hanging corpse (with the house in the background, the corpse's feet dangling in the foreground...).

It's an artistic, interesting way to set the scene for the story proper, but the film never again recovers the icy, morbid precision of its opening. Instead, it labors for effect, lingering on clues such as Mr. Carmichael's prosthetic arm, or his wife's fascination with hunting. Peggy's psychological problems are revealed in flashbacks of her therapy sessions, but one is never convinced she is out of her mind. Her husband, the school and its bizarre occupants are all highly suspicious, so *Fear in the Night* never plays as ambiguous. It's clear there is a conspiracy from the beginning. This fact doesn't necessarily ruin the film, it just makes it all the more predictable.

Peter Cushing has a small but crucial role in the film, and one senses he is in the film simply to grant it a little marquee value. Ditto Joan Collins, who is missing in action for the early part of the film, until arriving to portray an all too familiar character in her repertoire (a bitch...). Still, it is undeniably fun to see Cushing as a psycho, prowling the halls of the school, and Collins can do no wrong while playing a sexually promiscuous manipulator. As for Judy Geeson, she has always been an underrated actress, and has given good performances on TV (*Space: 1999*: "Another Time, Another Place") and film. She's an effective lead, and it is easy to sympathize with her plight. Indeed, the best sections of the film are those that find her in imminent physical danger, stalked and pursued by a dark figure with a mechanical arm. All the mental games (is she or isn't she nuts?) are a wash, but Geeson's screen presence makes the threats to her feel immediate.

Fear in the Night is a Hammer film through and through, meaning it is neither overtly scary, ambitiously artistic, nor particularly bad. Production values are good, the cast has fun with the material, and the story is interesting in an unchallenging way. But, like its later *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* films, this Hammer entry is sort of thriller-"lite." It doesn't have the intelligence or weight to merit comparison to a truly interesting (or dark) psychological thriller like *Frenzy*, *Psycho*, or even *And Soon the Darkness*.

From Beyond the Grave (1973) * * * 1/2

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Shopkeeper); Ian Bannen, Ian Carmichael, Diana Dors, Margaret Leighton, Donald Pleasence, Nyree Dawn Porter, David Warner, Ian Ogilvy, Lesley Anne Down, Jack Watson, Angela Pleasence, Wendy Allnutt, Rosalind Ayres, Tommy Godfrey, Ben Howard, John O'Farrell, Marcel Steiner.

CREW: An Amicus Production. *Director of Photography:* Alan Hume. *Camera Operator:* Derek Browne. *Camera Focus:* Michael Frift. *Prints:* Technicolor. *Production Design:* Maurice Carter. *Art Director:* Bert Davey. *Set Dresser:* Simon Wakefield. *Construction Manager:* Vic Simpson. *Editor:* John Ireland. *Sound Mixer:* Peter Handford. *Sound Editor:* Peter Keen. *Dubbing Mixer:* Nolan Roberts. *Unit Production Manager:* Teresa Bolland. *First Assistant Director:* John Peverall. *Continuity:* Penny Daniels. *Second Assistant Director:* Graham Easton. *Chief Make-up:* Neville Smallwood. *Chief Hairdresser:* Milos Parker. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* John Hilling. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Ruth Knight. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Douglas Gamley. *Associate Producer:* John Dark. *Screenplay by:* Robin Clarke, Raymond Christodoulou. *Based on Stories by:* R. Chetwynd-Hayes. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg, Milton Subotsky. *Directed by:* Kevin Connor. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A malevolent shopkeeper dispatches cursed goods to a quartet of patrons.

Edward, the first customer at the store, thinks he is conning the dealer out of a valuable mirror by claiming it is a reproduction, but the con is on him. During a séance, an evil spirit inhabiting the mirror possesses him. This ghoulish demands that Edward commit murder so he may be released from his reflection prison. Edward reluctantly complies, and is trapped inside the mirror until he too is freed in similar fashion.

Meanwhile, a henpecked husband steals a war medal from the

antique shop. He befriends a beggar and his beautiful daughter, and claims that he was awarded the medal in war. Before long, the thief is at the center of a family dispute, murder and an illicit relationship. In the end, he finds that it has all been part of his son's conspiracy to get rid of him.

Another customer at Temptation Ltd., Reggie, switches prices on two snuff-boxes, so as to purchase the one he wants more cheaply. Thinking he has gotten away scot-free, Reggie takes his box and boards a train. There, an occultist promptly informs him that an invisible, bodyless creature called an elemental is feeding off him. Soon afterwards, people begin to complain that Reggie is hurting them, though he has not made any physical contact. That night, his wife feels him holding her hand in bed ... when Reggie is doing no such thing. Realizing that he is haunted by this elemental, Reggie hires Madame Orloff, the occultist, and she exorcises the spirit. Unfortunately, the elemental leaves Reggie, and possesses Susan ... with fatal results for Reggie.

The fourth customer, Seaton, buys an antique door and installs it inside his house. The door leads not to a closet, but a dank, blue room. Seaton and his wife explore it, and realize it is the sanctuary of a sadist and witch named Sinclair. The dungeon-like room borders our reality and Seaton soon realizes it must be destroyed. He rescues his wife from Sinclair's grasp, smashes the door to bits, and breaks free of the evil dimension, family intact.

Back at the store, the shopkeeper continues his evil ways.

COMMENTARY: Amicus has a way with anthologies, and *From Beyond the Grave* is one of its best in this format. Director Kevin (Motel Hell [1980]) Connor, who began his film career as an editor, has a special understanding of pace and technique, one that he successfully applies to the low-budget film. The film thus builds momentum from story to story, ultimately seeming far more cohesive than the scattershot *Tales from the Crypt* or its even less satisfying sequel, *Vault of Horror*.

The first story in *From Beyond the Grave* is one that could have inspired *Hellraiser* (1987). A man lures unsuspecting low-lives (i.e. prostitutes) to his dreary apartment so he may murder them and

bring back to life an evil spirit who holds sway over him. It's good, gory fun, with Warner in the lead role. This descent into madness, with the arrogant Warner ultimately becoming the servant of evil, trapped himself in the "other world" of the mirror, is pretty messy stuff. Connor, who has a flair for this sort of material, stages it all with relish. A spinning camera enlivens a séance, and blood splatters like water on numerous occasions. It's frightfully gruesome.

The second story is a bit kinder and gentler. It's all a matter of misdirection as a cheating husband thinks he is in charge, when in fact, there is another game being played all along. It's less overtly horrific than the opening story, but the characters are more interesting, and the film's rhythm is established. That's why *From Beyond the Grave* is actually pretty good. The film is structured not as the typical anthology might be, with each story an entity in and of itself with distinct highs and lows and other characteristics, but as one overall film with different movements. It works.

The third story at first blush might look to be a spoof of *The Exorcist*, with a funny medium hoping to cast out an elemental that is bothering a poor chap. There are *Exorcist*-style manifestations as a murderous, invisible spirit goes nuts. Plates crash, ceramics explode, lamp shades fly about, and so on. Yet when this author talked to director Kevin Connor at the Main Mission 2000 convention in September of 2000, he learned that *From Beyond the Grave* was made before *The Exorcist* was released. That the story plays as a spoof of that popular film is merely a happy happenstance. Of all of *From Beyond the Grave*'s stories, the third tale is the most overtly tongue-in-cheek, but it still has enough bite to keep the swell of momentum going into the fourth, and most horrific story.

In the last tale, a doorway opens into the realm of an undead sadist, and the story really chills. When the murderous Sinclair comes out of the shadows to pursue Seaton, that precious adrenaline rush that horror movie fans treasure so much is delivered. The set-up is basic, but that's the case in most horror films. Connor's camera clearly establishes the rules. Behind the door, Sinclair reigns. Beyond the door lies the normal. The fun of the story comes in when Connor

violates these rules, blurs the territories, and leaves the audience unnerved and uncertain. It is the climax of the film not just because it is the fourth and final story in the mix, but because it is the most intense of the bunch.

From Beyond the Grave is a fun, energetically directed horror movie. Its director loves the genre, and it shows.

LEGACY: In 1987, Paramount Studios syndicated *Friday the 13th: The Series* (1987–1991). The premise? An evil shopkeeper dispenses cursed antiques to his unsuspecting customers, until the shopkeeper's cousins take over the business, and attempt to retrieve the evil goods. It owed more than a bit to *From Beyond the Grave*.

It's Alive (1973) * * * *

Critical Reception

“Schlock shock is a proliferating subspecies: the horror flick that will do anything, show anything, to churn a stomach.... *It's Alive* is the latest example of schlock shock.... What's most troublesome about *It's Alive* even beyond its shoddiness, is the cynicism with which it was concocted.”—Jay Cocks, *Time*: “Scarred at Birth,” March 3, 1975, page 6.

“A slick throwback to the old monster days, though using the topical gimmick of pollution, was *It's Alive*.... Cohen has a nice line in black humour, best demonstrated in a scene where we see a milkman fall victim to the hungry little monster.... Definitely not a film for expectant mothers.”—John Brosnan, *Future Tense*, St. Martin's Press, 1978, pages 221–222.

“...never less than ridiculous and absurd, but it has a strong kinetic force that carries you through to the end. The film isn't exactly clever, but it certainly seems to have some new ideas about horror. The ending is predictable, yet compelling.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 150.

“Over padded horror comic whose effective moments are rather too few and far between.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 151.

Cast & Crew

CAST: John P. Ryan (Frank Davis); Sharon Farrell

(Lenore Davis); Andrew Duggan (the Professor); Guy Stockwell (Bob Clayton); James Dixon (Lt. Perkins); Michael Ansara (the Captain); Robert Emhardt (the Executive); William Wellman, Jr. (Charley); Shamus Locke (the Doctor); Daniel Holzman (Chris) and Mary Nancy Burnett, Patrick McAllister, Diana Hale, Gerald York, Jerry Taft, Gwil Richards, W. Allen York.

CREW: Warner Brothers Communications Company Presents a Larco Production, *It's Alive*. *Photographed by:* Fenton Hamilton. *Edited by:* Peter Honess. *Filmed with:* Panavision Equipment. *Make-up:* Rick Baker. *Production Assistants:* Rob Cohen, Reid Freehman. *Sound Effects:* Robert Biggart, Patrick Somerset. *Titles and Opticals:* Imagic, Inc. *Production Consultant:* Steve Salkin. *Executive Producers:* Peter Sabiston. *Co-Producer:* Janelle Cohen. *Music:* Bernard Herrmann. *Written, Produced and Directed by:* Larry Cohen. A Larry Cohen Film, Distributed by Warner Brothers. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 91 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Frank Davis's expectant wife, Lenore, awakens in the middle of the night as she goes into labor. Frank wakes their son, Chris, who is worried that his mother might die while delivering the child. Frank quiets Chris's fears, and takes one last look around the new nursery: a beacon of hope in their house. Then he drives his family to the hospital for what should be a routine delivery.

While Frank waits to hear about his new baby, something goes terribly wrong in the delivery room. The Davis baby is not normal, and it kills an entire surgical team. After committing these bloody deeds, the baby then disappears into the night, leaving a traumatized Davis family behind. While the police begin a search for the homicidal infant, the doctors ask Lenore and Frank about radiation exposure. They want to test the entire Davis family, but Frank refuses.

On the long ride back home, Frank hears a radio newscaster announce his name as being the father of a mutant baby. He is

horrified at his new infamy, and at work, he is sent on a three-week vacation because of the incident. Then, Davis is unexpectedly fired. At home, a reporter masquerading as a nurse tries to get a story out of Lenore, but is dismissed by Frank. Meanwhile, the Davis baby blazes a killing streak across Los Angeles, making its way into a milk truck and murdering the driver.



Baby's first steps: The mutant of *It's Alive* (1973) looks for Mommy...

A local university wants to examine the mutant infant, and a representative approaches Frank about getting the rights to the baby's corpse after the police kill it. Eager to have the whole affair behind him, Frank signs off on the document. The police corner the infant at a school on Hawthorne Street, and Frank heads to the scene. The baby escapes after killing another cop. The baby finds its way to the Davis home and Lenore, who still considers the monster her child, begins to care for the baby in secret.

When Frank learns of the baby's proximity, he takes down his pistol to kill it. It escapes, killing another neighbor, and Frank takes part in the manhunt with the police. The wounded infant makes its way into the sewers, and eventually it is Davis himself who finds his son.

He corners it and talks to it, and suddenly sympathizes with the solitary, lonely creature in the dark. Davis has a change of heart and realizes the monster—for all its horrible qualities—is a living thing worthy of love. He flees with the baby as the police bear down on him. The cops corner Frank, and he begs for them to let his child live. They ignore his pleas and kill the mutant child, leaving Frank and Lenore to mourn another terrible loss.

As Frank and Lenore head for home after the ordeal, they learn a shocking bit of news. Another mutant baby has been born in Seattle.

COMMENTARY: Low-budget as it may be, Larry Cohen's *It's Alive* is a brilliant horror film. It speaks meaningfully about the fears of its time, and despite some descents into gore, actually focuses on character and relationships rather than vicious murders.

Cohen develops audience sympathy for the Davis family from the first frame of the film. They are depicted as a normal, middle-class American family living blissfully in the suburbs. They have a cat, a car, and even a nursery, and they await their blessed event with a combination of eagerness and anxiety. Before Lenore goes to the hospital, Frank pauses to silently consider the home nursery, and the audience can't help but think of all the hopes and fears associated with pregnancy. Then, at the hospital, there are shots of normal babies, seen across a glass barrier. Expectations are raised again, and acknowledged. "I hope we have one like that," Frank says, full of hope.

Like the best horror scenarios, *It's Alive* begins with the routine, the normal, and then takes a turn into the unexpected. Here, Cohen documents that normality—the dreams and aspirations of a "typical" family—and twists them.

After the depiction of the normal, Cohen introduces the threat, the cause of all the horror. Interestingly, there is no specific threat or cause for the horrible events that follow in *It's Alive*. Instead, Cohen's film provides a laundry list of possible explanations for the baby's mutant nature. A group of tense fathers-to-be sit together in a waiting room, and their discussion lingers on some interesting dreads. "There's an overabundance of lead in everything we eat,"

one father declares, afraid. "There's smog outside," another notes warily. When the baby is born "wrong," this kind of speculation continues undeterred, this time coming from medical professionals. "You've never been exposed to radiation or extensive x-rays, have you?" The Davises are asked. At another juncture, Lenore's previous use of the birth control pill (for 31 months) is raised as the culprit for the odd mutation. Science has no answers, but the human mind fills in the gaps. There are a million reasons why something could have gone wrong with this baby...

The possible reasons for the mutation just keep coming in *It's Alive*, and wisely, Cohen never settles on one as the answer. Instead, the cumulative effect of all the hysterical, desperate guesswork is that the audience gleans a different, but critical, message about causation: *it's just the time we're living in*. That's what was so great (and so troubling) about the 1970s. People were questioning everything. What would be the end result of pollution? Ozone depletion? Dependence on nuclear power? Radiation? The birth control pill? Proximity to microwave ovens? Acid rain? Bad meat?

You name it, and people were concerned about it. Why were the '70s such an era of worry? Consider again that people were very aware in the early '70s that the government was not being straight with them. Whether it was about the Vietnam War or the Watergate break-in, there seemed to be secrets and lies everywhere. Unsettled, America's people began to wonder what else might be hidden. *It's Alive* is the ultimate expression of such fear: that things we don't know are actually killing us, and threatening our future (i.e. our children).

But *It's Alive* is a damned good film because it makes these fears personal ones, rather than merely societal. Frank Davis returns to his nursery after his wife has given birth to the homicidal mutant. He walks into the chamber, hopeless, shattered. He gazes at himself in the mirror, and his unspoken question is obvious. *Is it me?* What's wrong with me? Did I create this monster? Davis is unable to accept the child as his own because he fears that somehow, in some way, he is responsible for its anti-social behavior. Is that not the fear of all parents, when it comes down to it? Are not all parents afraid that they made a mistake in child rearing? How often have we seen

the parents of serial killers struggling with the notion of responsibility? What could they have done differently to prevent the atrocities committed by their children? *It's Alive* walks meaningfully in that territory too, as Ryan is first repulsed by his monster child, and later realizes that, for all its evil, it is still a living creature that he helped bring into the world. *It's Alive* is about people, not ghoulies, because it concerns Davis's struggle, and the stages of his acceptance. It asks the question: can we still love something that has done wrong? Can we love a creature that is unlike us, and yet accept it as our own?

It's interesting that the Davises own a cat. There, already, they have accepted something different, and "feral" in their household. The monster child, so anti-social, is acting according to its nature too, but is not treated with the same love as even the cat ... because expectations for it were different.

The reason for such rejection may simply be a result of society's pressure. The Davises are immediately ostracized for having conceived something "different." Davis loses his job, the press tells all kinds of stories, and the police are suspicious. In its own way, *It's Alive* is about the ways that society forms its own answers about things. Really, what happens to the Davises in *It's Alive* is not that different from what has happened to the parents of JonBenet Ramsey. Nobody knows who killed their daughter, but the Ramseys are considered guilty *a priori*. Whether they killed their own child or not, the Ramseys have been judged as "bad" by the public. That little girl should not have been wearing so much make-up. Mrs. Ramsey should not have been so hard on JonBenet about bedwetting. And so on. Suddenly, every decision made by those parents is second-guessed and judged in context of a perceived crime. Similarly, in *It's Alive*, people start to ask questions about the Davises. Aren't they a little old to be having children? Did they ever consider abortion? Was Mrs. Davis on the birth control pill for too long? What did they do wrong that *this* should have happened to them? The implication is obvious: society blames the parents.

So *It's Alive* is really the story of Frank Davis and his wife as they face two apocalypses. One involves their own fear that they have created something monstrous. The other is society's condemnation

of them for creating that monstrous thing. Though people may call it schlock, the film is rather meaningful when viewed in this context.

And, Cohen does not go over the top to achieve his effects, even sparing the audience the expected birthing sequence. Instead, Mr. Davis happens upon the operating theater, post-massacre. Blood is everywhere, the team of doctors is dead, and there is gore galore. But, imagine how much worse it could have been, had Cohen's camera witnessed the "actual" delivery. It's true that the budget could not have afforded that, but had Cohen wanted to be graphic, he could have been. Instead, he opts only to show the aftermath, letting the audience wonder about the actual birth. Smart move. Our idea of the birth is probably far more disgusting than anything that might have been achieved.

Another horror sequence is shot to maximum thematic effect too. The mutant baby kills a milkman, and his crimson blood mixes with the white, creamy, spilled milk. That's a perfect image for this film. The Davises were expecting a baby who would be nourished on milk. Instead, they got one who lusted for blood. Yet, interestingly, the monster still needs the love any baby would. The milk and the blood mix, just as the monster is both innocent and culprit. Like the bloody milk, it is neither fish nor fowl.

Many critics have indicated that *It's Alive* is actually about abortion. Some see it as pro-choice (had the baby been aborted, none of this would have happened!), but others argue it is blatantly pro-life. Davis tries to save his baby, and see its value, even though it is deformed and murderous. The movie does seem to state that the creature deserves to live, despite its crimes. But abortion is a contentious issue, and one senses *It's Alive* is about humanity more than some political football. It's about people who, through no fault of their own, give birth to something horrible. Society condemns them, and tries to destroy both their creation and their reputation. Amidst that pressure, the family clings together, and even tries to love what has caused them so much strife. In this regard, the movie is actually about the human heart, and the capacity to love unconditionally. It is a remarkable film.

LEGACY: On the strength of *It's Alive*, independent filmmaker Larry

Cohen became a popular horror/cult director with his own cadre of admirers. In addition to two “monster baby” sequels (*It Lives Again* [1978] and *It's Alive III: Island of the Alive* [1986]), Cohen has contributed several memorable (and low-budget) pictures to the genre, including *God Told Me To* (1976), *Q—The Winged Serpent* (1982), *A Return to Salem's Lot* (1987) and *The Ambulance* (1990). *It's Alive* shows up regularly around 3:00 A.M. on national cable channels, a mainstay of '70s schlock.

***The Legend of Boggy Creek* (1973) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Chuck Pierce (Jim as Boy); William Stump (Jim as Adult); Willie E. Smith (Himself); Lloyd Bowen (Himself); B.R. Barrington (Himself); Smokey Crabtree (Himself); Travis Crabtree (Himself); John M. Oates (Himself); Buddy Crabtree (Himself); Jeff Crabtree (Fred Crabtree); Judy Dalton (Mary Beth Searcy); Mary B. Johnston (Sister); Louise Searcy (Herself); Dina Louise Sorell (Baby); Philip Bradley (Teenage Hunter); Herb Jones (Himself); Steve Lyons, Patty Dougan (Teenage Couple); Dennis Lamb (Mr. Kennedy).

CREW: From Cinema Shares International Distribution Corporation. Pierce-Ledwell Productions Presents *The Legend of Boggy Creek*. *Screenplay:* Earl E. Smith. *Music:* James Mendoza-Nava. *Narrated by:* Vern Stierman. *Executive Producers:* L.B. Ledwell, Jr., and Charles B. Pierce. *Produced and Directed by:* Charles B. Pierce. *Editor:* Tom Boutrose. *Associate Producer:* Earl E. Smith. *Photographed by:* Charles B. Pierce. “*The Legend of Boggy Creek*” written by Earl E. Smith, sung by Chuck Bryant. “*Nobody Sees the Flowers but Me*” written by Earl E. Smith, sung by Jimmy Collins. *Filmed in* Techniscope. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* G. *Running Time:* 87 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: There's a quiet little town in Southwest Arkansas called Fouke, a town that borders on Texas and has a population of approximately 350. It's a simple town of farmers and hunters that's "a right pleasant" place to live ... until the sun goes down, that is. By black night, a hairy man-beast living near Boggy Creek ventures into civilization. Years ago, a seven year old boy named Jim saw the "Fouke Monster" in a sprawling field, and now he has returned to Fouke to narrate the story of the Boggy Creek monster.

Long after Jim's childhood encounter with the creature of Boggy Creek, reports of the monster's activity have spread. The creature came up from the bog and carried off both of John Oates' 200 lb. hogs on one occasion, and another resident, Willie E. Smith, shot at the shaggy creature with a shotgun. On a different evening, the Fouke monster followed the shore of Boggy Creek to the isolated Searcy home, where two sisters were alone for the evening with no phone, and the nearest neighbors were a mile or so away. Mary Beth Search fainted after seeing the hairy beast outside her window, and the family kitten died from fright at the sight of the monster. In the following weeks, a teenage hunter wounded the beast with his rifle while tracking a deer.

No longer able to ignore their problem, the good citizens of Fouke organize a big hunt on foot and horseback, and the creature retreats—not to be seen again for some eight years. Consequently, backwoods hermit Herb Johnson refutes the creature's existence to his friend Travis Crabtree. If such a creature existed, Herb is certain he would have seen it by now.

Years later, farmer O.H. Kennedy, who lives on the outskirts of Fouke, reports finding monstrous footprints (with 3 toes) in his bean field. The national press catches wind of the local story, and investigates the area around the creek to determine if there is a "sasquatch" on the loose. Growing bold, the Boggy Creek monster ventures upstream and attacks a house where three teens are having a pajama party. Later, he kills a dog in front of a mobile home.

Then, on one especially frightening occasion, the creature almost gains entrance to a house where two young married couples are staying. The creature reaches in through an open window and is subsequently shot at. Angry, the creature attacks again, injuring a

resident.

Jim, the narrator of this unusual local legend, returns to his old home—the field where he once encountered a monster—and reminisces about the beast and his fear of it. He also shares a warning with his audience: if you're ever in Arkansas after nightfall, beware of the hairy man-beast that roams the land around Boggy Creek. Satisfied that “there's still a bit of wilderness” and still “some mysteries” left in the world, Jim signs off.

COMMENTARY: Before *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), before *The Amityville Horror* (1979), there was this low-budget curiosity, a home-spun Arkansas film based on a “true story” about a local monster who dwelled in the wilds of Arkansas. Ironically, the best and worst elements of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* derive from the same source: the film's ability and willingness to capture a sense of place.

Boggy Creek opens with mystery. A prowling camera (in a boat) searches the land and water around Boggy Creek in a slow, almost dreamy, state. Beavers, turtles, lizards and birds all go about their business, unimpeded, as the cameraman (director Pierce) captures the action in workman-like, but not inefficient fashion. There are some creaky zooms, a photographic technique indicative of the times, and a few clumsy rack focuses that nonetheless capture the natural beauty of the land. But mostly there is a real feeling for the sprawl of the wild. Sounds of the wilderness punctuate the soundtrack, and in its opening moments, *The Legend of Boggy Creek* lives up to its final meditation: that there are still some mysteries left in the world. In this half-explored universe of gnarled trees, criss-crossing branches, eerily calm waters and varied wildlife, a viewer is able to temporarily suspend disbelief. What mysteries lurk here? How did this world, often unseen by man, evolve? Is it possible that out here, in the dark woods of Arkansas, some kind of monster dwells? The opening montage of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* permits room for such ruminations, and wisely puts the viewer in the right frame of mind to consider what is supposedly a “true” story.

Yet even in his observance of this untapped setting, director Pierce, and editor Tom Boutrose, missteps. There are no less than 23 shots

of Boggy Creek and its wildlife in the opening montage, some shots held for as long 30 seconds. Though the dedication to creating backdrop and mood is commendable, the same feeling, the same rhythm could probably have been generated with half as many shots. But that fact is part and parcel of this film's problem. It is competently made, and even modestly clever, but it never reveals itself to be artistic, at least not in the manner that the brilliant *Blair Witch Project* manages. The *Boggy Creek* approach does reveal to viewers a different and mysterious world, the backwoods of Arkansas, but it never generates the kind of fear and tension the filmmakers seemingly desire.

Part of that failure may have to do with something else that *The Legend of Boggy Creek* manages to establish expertly with its "authentic" feel and local color. Quite simply, the people "dramatized" in this film are not well served by the straight-faced, solemn approach to the material. These people, Arkansas natives all, either of their own free will or at the direction of Charles Pierce, say some very funny, very stupid things. The result of the unintentionally funny dialogue, coupled with the distinct Arkansas accent, is a feeling that everyone who lives in this particular region of the country is a bumpkin. Of course, such an assertion is not at all true. Arkansas has many smart people living there, but few (it seems from the movie) dwell anywhere in the vicinity of Boggy Creek.

The Blair Witch Project was a clever film because it depicted the locals of Burkittsville (formerly Blair) with a sense of irony and distance. They were local yokels, all right, but the three visiting film students were outsiders who judged everything with irony and contempt. Thus the film, which found the arrogant students facing their comeuppance in the woods, was a comment on slacker cynicism and the post-modern, media-driven Generation-Next.

By contrast, *The Legend of Boggy Creek* is respectful, even worshipful of those from whom it gleans its critical testimony. That these people may be a little weird, a little uneducated, or even just perhaps a bit different, is never suggested, never whispered, never hinted at. For instance, the narrator of the film, a wise-sounding authority, expresses delight that a big hunt is being organized to

catch the Boggy Creek monster. Excited, he enthuses that even “famous dogs from Tennessee” have been recruited for the important mission.

All that can be said about that is that you know you live in a small southern state when the canines of another state are your local celebrities.

Even more comically, local fisherman Travis Crabtree visits a hermit named Herb Johnson at one point in the film. Herb, who lives in a tent on the banks of Boggy Creek and is proud of his “bottle tree” (literally a tree in which large moonshine bottles have been hung...), is treated like the town oracle, as a wise and knowledgeable elder. That in itself is not funny, but the narrator’s opening revelation about him is. Herb, you see, shot off “half of his foot” during a “boating accident” some 14 years back.

Again, a town is in real trouble when its elder statesman is a guy who blew his toes off fishing.

That Travis is seen rowing a canoe to the strains of his very own folk song (“Hey Travis Crabtree, Do You See What I See?”) adds to the comedic aura of the sequence.

Okay, it is easy to make regional jokes, and one can make all kinds of cruel-hearted jokes about New Jersey, Virginia, South Carolina, Arkansas, California or just about any other region in the United States with equal sarcasm. The point of these criticisms is not that Arkansas is a state of bumpkins, but that the film, by recording these “real” people in this bizarre light, suggests that, indeed, the good people of Fouke are, well ... idiots.

Take for example the nighttime siege that leads up to the climax of the picture. The Boggy Creek monster has just attacked a house during blackest night, and what does one concerned character do? Well, he takes the opportunity to go to the toilet, of course! Then, while he is *in medias res* there, the monster breaks into the bathroom, causing the terrified man to fly skittering off the toilet, his pants still half-down, screaming. The timing, setting and direction of this “jolt” incline one to laugh, not scream, and yet Charles B. Pierce probably intended the opposite. So, even as Pierce

manages to create suspension of disbelief by capturing the wilds of Arkansas and allowing for the possibility of a Big Foot-like animal, he inadvertently creates humor and ridicule by revealing the “real” people of Fouke (playing themselves...) to be somewhat less than intelligent.

The final straw, perhaps, is that even the creature of *Boggy Creek* merits its own folk song, which is heard not just once, but twice in the picture. “Here the sulfur river flows ... this is where the creature goes ... safe within a world he knows,” the singer warbles, creating another very funny effect in what is obviously intended as a serious picture.

While watching *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, this author’s wife, his barometer of the bad, expressed the notion that so inept and toothless a horror picture could only be meant for the eyes of children. It is rated G, after all. However, one must again wonder if the film’s lack of thrills is intentional. When the monster attacks the Searcy house, the family’s cat dies of sheer terror. Subsequently director Pierce treats his audience to an intense close-up of the dead-cat, its eyes wide, its mouth agape with terror. Though inherently silly, the image of a dead household pet is not exactly suitable for children.

Actually, this scene leads back to the earlier conclusion that, well, the people of this town are just not very smart. Mary Beth Searcy (who eerily resembles Paula Jones...) is home alone at night, and she hears something strange outside her living room window. Her little black kitten meows with fear and terror at the sound. Oddly, the very next shot is of Mary Beth putting the poor, terrified kitten out on the porch! The next morning, Searcy is shocked to find it expired, “scared to death,” but what the hell did she expect by putting it out in the night when it was so obviously terrified of whatever was lurking in the bushes?

By utilizing a shaky camera and tight framing in the film’s pajama party attack sequence, it is clear Pierce is hoping to generate suspense, thrills and chills in *Legend of Boggy Creek*. These effects are out of his reach because the titular creature never actually does anything scary, or even particularly significant. Pierce is unable to deliver on any of his action scenes, perhaps because of budgetary

restraints, perhaps because the monster is fairly harmless. Regardless of the reason for the failure, each action set piece results in what can only kindly be termed anti-climax.

In one attack scene, the creature “attacks” a house and “smashes flowerpots” (out of what the film terms “lonely frustration”) and then disappears. Two other times, he comes out of the woods, shambles around, and disappears. Since he never actually threatens anybody with physical danger, these scenes literally have nowhere to go. And, if one is being analytical about this, one cannot really blame old Boggy for the dead cat. He was just a bystander, and could not help if it his “sour, pig-pen” odor and hideous appearance are fatal to others. Thus the action scenes build and build, and then lead to nothing except smashed garden pottery and a fatal feline infarction.

Is *The Legend of Boggy Creek* presented believably? The opening card of the film establishes it “is a true story” and that “some of the people in this motion picture portray themselves—in many cases on actual location” (meaning, inevitably, mobile homes...), but the film techniques unfurled by Pierce undercut the notion that any of this really happened. For instance, there is no attempt to document the passage of time. Jim (the narrator) sees the monster when he is at the tender age of 7. The creature goes on the attack for several years, then disappears for eight years, and then returns. Yet hairstyles, clothes, even car models, never change to acknowledge the passage of time. Judging by the film, it seems to have been 1970 for ten years at least.

Also, the narrator never attempts to indicate that what the audience is seeing is actually a “dramatization” of the events, rather than documentary footage of the events. This is troubling for a number of reasons. Firstly, how is one to account for all the well-considered cuts and camera angles if this is “occurring as live?” When little Jimmy runs across a golden field at sunset (a beautiful image, by the way), the audience is treated to a long shot, a close shot, a tracking shot, and even what appears to be an aerial shot from tree level. The rest of the movie follows suit, even revealing the monster in a fairly detailed medium shot. The movie cannot be considered “documentary” because of the very film techniques it exploits. If it

were a documentary, we would be lucky to catch a fleeting glimpse of the monster, let alone such lingering shots of the hairy beast.

As dramatization, the film fails to persuade as well. Fully three eyewitness participants in this legend are from the same family, the Crabtrees, and that seems more than a tad suspicious. No compelling evidence is presented (not a single audio recording, a photograph, or a super 8 film is anywhere.) What results is a film that tries to sneak by under the auspices of being true without really ever reaching legitimacy. Even bogus TV series such as *In Search of* or *Sightings* interview authorities on paranormal or supernatural events, and acknowledge their re-creations as such.

The best way to appreciate *The Legend of Boggy Creek* is to watch the opening montage, and imagine just how scary and interesting it would be if a monster did dwell out there, in that beautiful but dangerous realm of the unknown. Then, when the first character opens his mouth, turn off the VCR . That way, one can maintain respect for the great state of Arkansas, as well as preserve the commendable notion that there are still “some mysteries” out there in the dark, in the night.

LEGACY: A surprise box office winner, *The Legend of Boggy Creek* spawned two less-successful sequels, *Return to Boggy Creek* (1978), and *Boggy Creek II* (1985). Perhaps more importantly, its documentary approach to horrific material was revived, generally to kudos, in the 1999 sleeper *The Blair Witch Project*. Director Charles B. Pierce returned with another low-budget hit in 1976, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*, this one about a masked serial killer in Texarkana.

The Legend of Hell House (1973) * * * *

Critical Reception

“It’s a supernatural thriller; it’s a shocker, with things leaping out of corners ... and its an almost-convincing pseudoscientific study of psychic events ... a tightly wound and really scary story, which has been directed by John Hough with a great deal

of sympathy for the novel's spirit."—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 367.

"Genuinely frightening haunted house chiller with just the right style and atmosphere. Not for the nervous."—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 171.

"...the grooviest, ghastliest ghost story to come along since *The Haunting*.... The movie is so harrowing that the let-down ending is a relief."—Margaret Ronan, *Senior Scholastic*, September 20, 1973

"While not perfect, this film pulled a series of time worn threads from the science fiction arena into a horror sub-genre that lives with us today in *The X-Files*—science versus things that go bump in the night (as opposed to giant grasshoppers). The cynic learning to believe in evil is as old as horror, but the cynic in scientist's garb, having taken an evolutionary step up from being the cause of the evil, is certainly an interesting approach, and one of a handful of times a Richard Matheson novel has survived a big-screen treatment."—Bill Latham, *Mary's Monster*, Powys Books.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Roddy McDowall (Ben Fischer); Pamela Franklin (Florence Tanner); Clive Revill (Dr. Lionel Barrett); Gayle Hunnicut (Ann Barrett); Roland Culver (Mr. Deutsch); Peter Bowles (Haney).

CREW: Academy Pictures Corporation Presents a James H. Nicholson Production, *The Legend of Hell House*. *Music and Electronic Score:* Brian Hodgson, Delia Derbyshire. *Executive Producer:* James H. Nicholson. *Screenplay:* Richard Matheson. *Based on*

His Novel Hell House. Produced by: Albert Fennell, Nortman T. Herman. *Directed by:* John Hough. *Production Manager:* Ron Fry. *Assistant Director:* Bert Batt. *Continuity:* Gladys Goldsmith. *Casting Director:* Sally Nicholl. *Technical Advisor:* Tom Corbett. *Director of Photography:* Alan Hume. *Camera Operator:* Tony White. *Make-up:* Linda Devetta. *Hairdresser:* Pat McDermott. *Photographic Effects:* Tom Howard. *Sets Designed by:* Robert Jones. *Assistant Art Director:* Kenneth McCallum Tait. *Special Effects:* Roy Whybrow. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Eileen Sullivan. *Editor:* Geoffrey Root. *Sound Recordist:* Les Hammond, Bill Rowe. *Dubbing Editor:* Peter Lennard. Made on location at EMI-MGM Elstree Studios, Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, England. Produced by Academy Picture Corporation. Released by 20th Century-Fox. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 94 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Just after they made *The Legend of Hell House*, people began making the really classy A-picture-type horror films, starting with *The Exorcist*, so had I held on to *Hell House* a few more years, it might have gotten that kind of treatment, too. It’s a B-plus, but it didn’t make A”²⁰.— Richard Matheson, author of *Legend of Hell House* (1973), discusses his perception of the film.

SYNOPSIS: Physicist Lionel Barrett is paid handsomely by an old millionaire, Mr. Deutsch, to confirm or disprove that life exists after death. To this end, Barrett is to spend five days with a team inside the Belasco House, a dwelling known as “Hell House” and the “Mount Everest of Haunted Houses,” to get his answer. The only sane survivor from the last expedition (in 1953), Fischer, joins the team. Florence Tanner, a mental medium also joins Barrett, Fischer and Barrett’s beautiful wife, Ann.

The team arrives at the strange old house, and finds that the windows are all bricked up by Belasco, the eccentric owner who did

not want guests looking out or outsiders looking in. Once inside, the team acquaints itself with the house, including the cellar, the chapel and a grand living room. On an old record player, Belasco's voice welcomes his new guests to Hell House.

Florence Tanner soon arrives at the theory that the house is being haunted by multiple surviving personalities, and Fischer tells Ann the history of the house. Built in 1919 by Belasco, a "Roaring giant" with some frightening hobbies including necrophilia, sadism, cannibalism, alcoholism, drug addiction and sexual fetishes. Then, in 1929, 27 guests were found dead inside Hell House, but Belasco was not among them. His body was never found. Later, Tanner conducts a sitting and senses the spirit of a disturbed young man, Daniel Belasco. In a changed voice, Daniel/Florence warns the others to get out of the house before he kills them. The sitting is repeated, this time under Barrett's scientific supervision. Electromagnetic energy is detected, as well as ectoplasm, but when Barrett insults Tanner's capabilities, the house responds in force. Barrett barely survives a poltergeist attack, and he blames Tanner for the occurrences.

By night, Ann is possessed by sexual visions and longings. She attempts to seduce Fischer, but he slaps her to break her out of the trance. Meanwhile, Florence searches for Daniel's corpse and finds it between the walls of the wine cellar. The boy is given a Christian burial, but the hauntings don't stop. Daniel's spirit returns to Florence and informs her he can only be free if she willingly makes love to him. Florence does so, and is unhinged by the experience.

On the following day, a special machine called a "reverser" is delivered to Hell House. Barrett's invention, the device is capable of reversing the electromagnetic radiation of the house and rendering it dead. Fischer warns Barrett not to fight Hell House, but Barrett ignores his warning even as his wife's sexual behavior becomes more pronounced. Barrett activates the machine as Tanner works up the courage to visit the chapel, the one room in Hell House she is afraid to enter. There, she learns the truth about Belasco, and is killed for her knowledge.

To Fischer's surprise, the reverser cleanses Hell House ... except for the chapel. The house strikes out, killing Lionel and leaving Fischer,

who has been reluctant to open his mind up to the house, to fight Belasco once and for all. Putting together clues from Barrett and Tanner, Fischer learns the secret of Belasco. He was no roaring giant at all, but a vain, short man who was so embarrassed by his small stature that he cut off his own legs and replaced them with artificial ones. Fischer's discovery destroys the spirit of the humiliated Belasco, and Ann and Fischer discover a lead room behind the chapel. There, the corpse of Belasco sits. There was no Daniel, no other spirits, just one evil man who found a kind of horrible life after death.

COMMENTARY: The highest compliment one can pay to 1973's *The Legend of Hell House* is that it would have made an outstanding episode of *The X-Files* (1993–). For, like that now-classic series, the film gracefully mixes horror and science to illuminating effect. In fact, the film is probably the most logical and intelligent “haunted house” movie yet created. More than just a film with a supernatural foe, *Legend of Hell House* artfully balances two opposing “religions,” science and mysticism.

The idea that a group of disparate, and quarrelsome, people should be forced to spend time together in a haunted house is not a new one. It was the fodder of *The Haunting* (1963) and *The House on Haunted Hill* (1959), to name but two. Yet *Legend of Hell House* takes this common premise further than other similar productions because of the manner in which it defines the characters that walk, eyes open, into the danger.

One character, Barrett, is a staunch advocate of science and rationality. He is so grounded, in fact, that his defense of science in the face of the supernatural actually seems irrational. He just can't accept something that doesn't fit his perception of Euclidian reality.

Another character, Tanner, subscribes to the idea that the universe is mystical, and rife with the supernatural. Like Barrett, Tanner is blind to anything that opposes her point of view.

Between these two poles of thought stand a non-aligned person (Barrett's wife), and a clever medium named Fischer (McDowall), who tries to balance the competing approaches. What's good about the film is the manner in which each “advocate” (Barrett and

Tanner respectively) is seduced by his or her own beliefs. Each is so obsessed with being right that the actual puzzle of the haunting is shunted aside. Over and over again, these competitors argue about who knows more in the situation. "She had to destroy my beliefs before they could destroy hers," a haughty Barrett declares at one important point. For him, anything anti-science is a personal assault. Tanner is the same way, a reflection of his closed-mindedness.

The importance of being right, ironically, is the very weakness, the character flaw, that the malevolent spirit of Belasco exploits against both Barrett and Tanner. These two opposites have more in common than they know, as they both suffer from their philosophical blindness. Barrett believes his scientific device can wipe out any "negative" energy in Hell House, and is proven wrong most drastically. Tanner believes that there are competing multiple spirits in the house, and is raped and ultimately murdered for her beliefs. They are both tricked, duped, and rather ruthlessly so.

The reason *Legend of Hell House* holds together so well is that the ghostly attacks orchestrated by Belasco have logical purpose and motivation. The right people are attacked at the right time, so to speak. In most films of this type, it is all supernatural fire and fury. It is rarely clear why the hauntings unfold as they do. In the case of *Hell House*, one detects that Belasco has been acting according to a consistent personal strategy. Every attack is part of his deliberate mind game to undermine his "visitors." He wants to have sex with Tanner, so he tricks her, utilizing her own pride as a weapon of undoing. She believes an innocent spirit named Daniel can be freed if only she has sex with him, and is so desperate to prove to Barrett that she is right that she goes through with the insane act. Of course, there is no Daniel after all, only Belasco, and he gets exactly what he wants ... roughly too.

It is no accident that science and mysticism both fail to stop Belasco's hauntings. The force that is finally proven effective against this "beast" is psychology. Fischer understands human nature, and he is able to defeat Belasco when he uncovers Belasco's personality flaw. He realizes that the "Roaring Giant" suffers from a Napoleon complex. He has a giant ego, but a little body. Thus

Fischer uses neither mysticism nor hard science to destroy the villain, but a comprehension of humanity, of psychology. In a sense, it is a reversal of everything Belasco has done in the film. The psychological brinksmanship has been reversed, turned against the perpetrator, and Belasco is vanquished.

Ironically, Fischer reaches his conclusion by pulling together elements of Barrett's philosophy, and Tanner's too. He is able to blend approaches, and that's why he survives the horror of Hell House.

The Legend of Hell House tries to get its details right, and that is another reason why it is an admirable horror film. At the same time that it is a frightening film, it asks the right questions about the paranormal. In particular, it wonders: do living people cause disturbances, like those attributed to Belasco, or are such manifestations actually the work of spirits? Parapsychology has still not answered that very important question, and *The Legend of Hell House* plays with the idea. For a time, Barrett suspects Tanner is actually causing the manifestations. She then accuses Fischer of being the origin of the supernatural happenings. He counter-accuses Tanner, and so forth. Nobody knows where the evil of Hell House originates, and that's what makes it so hard to defeat ... and so compelling. It's a mystery.

And indeed, that may be why, in the final analysis, the film is a trifle anti-climactic. This movie has the courage to stick to its guns. It has a statement to make about psychology and human nature, and once that statement is made, there are no further fireworks to share. Fans of the horror genre long for the last "jolt," the sting in the tale, or the spectacular finale, and *Legend of Hell House* only marginally delivers that. It isn't interested in such razzmatazz, only logic. For this reviewer, that's quite satisfactory. This movie plays by the rules, and there is no nonsensical ending to take a viewer out of its well-crafted reality. Once Belasco is defeated the film is over.

One might contrast this subdued approach with the re-make of *The Haunting* (1999), in which special effects were all-important, and the story made little or no sense. To this viewer's eyes, *Legend of Hell House* remains far scarier because, for the bulk of its running time, it only hints at evil forces, rather than depicting them through

overwrought CGI effects. That the end of *Legend of Hell House* fails to unleash a firestorm of effects on the audience is probably a testament to its integrity. It would rather scare audiences with ideas than with expensive pyrotechnics.

John Hough directs *The Legend of Hell House* with a welcome restraint and intelligence. In the moments where fear should be felt, he provides it. In the moments where awe should be generated, he crafts that too. The entire film is directed with an eye toward the artistic. Moving reflections in a coffee pot open one important scene. A cat crawls warily in the foreground of the foreboding house, obscured partially by mist, in the background of another scene. There is a long pan (in close up), establishing the scientific tools of Barrett, and so on. It's a restrained, but effective use of camera work throughout. The electronic music gets under one's skin, and the moments of pure horror—such as the poltergeist attack on Barrett—are staged with a terrifying zeal, equal to any mechanical effects one will find in *The Exorcist*.

The Legend of Hell House is often thought of as a good, not great film, and that may, ultimately, be because it has the courage of its convictions. It stands by its thesis, and doesn't succumb to the audience desire to be blown away. How rare, and how wonderful.

Phase IV

Cast & Crew

CAST: Nigel Davenport (Dr. Hobbs); Michael Murphy (James); Lynne Frederick (Kendra).

CREW: *Directed by:* Saul Bass. *Produced by:* Paul B. Radin. *Screenplay by:* Mayo Simon. *Director of Photography:* Dick Bush. *Music:* Brian Gascoigne. *Film Editor:* Willy Kempler. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: Out in the desert, a colony of ants begins to show signs of a “hive mind.” Scientists (Davenport and Murphy) set up an outpost from which to observe the ants, but the critters strike back, in

several strikingly photographed sequences. The ending, in which the ants seduce Murphy to their cause with a “possessed” Frederick, is strange and disturbing. The ant footage is amazing, and the direction of Bass is thought-provoking. A bizarre, but interesting “revenge of nature” film.

The Pyx (1973) * * 1½

Critical Reception

“Director Harvey Hart has worked well with film editor Ron Wisman in using flashbacks and cutting, giving pace and excitement and a good deal of suspense to a plot which opens with the death of Karen Black.... Miss Black gives a fine performance, ably assisted by Christopher Plummer, a policeman investigating her death.”—Beatrice McKenna, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIV, Number 10, December 1973, page 628.

“Neither devotees of murder mysteries nor devotees of the occult ... are likely to come away satisfied. Point the finger of guilt to a screenplay that tells less than enough about Christopher Plummer ... and so much about Karen Black.”—Lawrence Van Gelder, *New York Times*, March 28, page 34.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Karen Black (Elizabeth Lucy); Christopher Plummer (Detective Sgt. Jim Henderson); Donald Pilon (Detective Sgt. Pierre Paquette); Jean-Louis Roux (Keerson); Yvette Brina'Amour (Meg); Jacques Godin (Superintendent); Terry Haig (Jimmy); Lee Broker (Herbie Lefram); Robin Gammel (Werther); Louis Rinfret (Sandra). With: Gerard Parkes, Francine Moran, Therese Merange, Henry Gamer, Jean Dubost, Julie Wildman, Wally Martin, Gerard Richard, Jean-Guy Dubuc, Pierre Jolicoeur, Gilles Desormeaux, Jacques Galipeal,

Petronella Van Duk, John A. Sullivan, Laurence Luczko, Bob Wyngaert, Robert Viens, Robert Bealieu, Marcel Fournier, Pierre-Paul Belisle, Charles Beauchamp, Brian R. Erb.

CREW: From Cinerama Releasing, Maxine Samuels Presents a film by Harvey Hart, *The Pyx*. Songs *Composed and Sung by:* Karen Black. *Miss Black's Music Consultant:* Bob Johnston. *Director of Photography:* Rene Verzier. *Film Editor:* Ron Wisman. *Production Designer:* Earl Preston. *Costume Designer:* Estelle Leiter. *Supervisor of Make-up:* Julia Grundy. *Hairstyles:* Pierre Taylor. *Continuity:* Tatania Mihailoff. *Music:* Harry Freatman. *Conductor:* Victor Feldbrill. *Choir Conducted by:* Giles Bryant. *Location Manager:* Minou Petrowski. *Location Sound Mixer:* Richard Lightstone. *Sound Editor:* John Kelly. *Technical Consultant:* Pierre Sangollo, Jean-Guy Dubuc. *Production Supervisor:* Tolly Reviv. *Production Consultant:* Willard Goodman. *Associate Producer:* Paulle Clark. *Screenplay:* Robert Schlitt. *Based on the novel The Pyx by:* John Buell. *Produced by:* Julian Roffman. *Executive Producer:* Maxine Samuels. *Directed by:* Harvey Hart. *Casting:* Ian DeVoy. *Boom:* Normand Mercier. *First Assistant Camera:* Denis Gingras. *Second Assistant Camera:* Jean-Jacques Gervais. *Camera Grip:* Gerge Grenier. *Gaffer:* Don Saari. *Electrician:* John Sawyer. *Grip:* Raymond Lamy. *Assistant Directors:* Mark Bourgault and Samuel Wendel. *Property Master:* Fernand Durand. *Set Decorator:* Peter Hopkins. *Assistant Props:* Jacques Godbout. *Set Carpenter:* George Savard. *Assistant Editor:* Sandy Altwerger and Pamela Lewis. *Production Assistant:* Diane Marcoux. *Stunt Advisor:* Guy Marcenais. *Laboratory:* Quebec Film Labs. *Post-Production:* Film House. *Titles:* Film Opticals/Film Design. *Sound Mixer:* Paul Coombe. Filmed entirely on location in Montreal, Quebec. A Host-Rohar Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 111 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Detective Sgt. Henderson of the Montreal Police arrives at a crime scene to discover the corpse of a beautiful woman who apparently fell to her death from a high apartment ledge. Another cop recognizes the dead woman as a hooker, Elizabeth Lucy. Henderson commences his investigation, learning that Elizabeth was a Catholic, and a heroin addict. He grills Elizabeth's madam, the duplicitous Meg, but learns little.

Henderson searches the apartment from which Elizabeth fell, and unexpectedly finds himself grappling with the cagey landlord. From the landlord, Henderson learns of the involvement of two mystery figures: Lefram and Keerson. When Henderson returns to Meg's place to question her about these two strangers, he finds the madam and her girls have been brutally murdered.

Taking another tack, Henderson studies the items found on Elizabeth at the time of her death, a black Satanic crucifix and a "pyx," a small container for "the host" during communion. Suspecting some kind of cult activity, Henderson runs down more information on Lefram, the stooge who hired Elizabeth for his boss, Keerson.

Next, Henderson questions Elizabeth's homosexual roommate, Jimmy, but the young man is shot by a sniper as he reveals details of Elizabeth's last night alive, and her fateful meeting with the rich customer, Keerson. Henderson pursues the sniper, Lefram, and there is a bloody shoot-out on a boat. Finally, Henderson gets to Keerson, and learns that the lonely but good-hearted Elizabeth was sacrificed during a black mass.

Henderson is unsettled, however, when Keerson seems to know secrets about him that none should know ... none but the Devil. Henderson shoots Keerson dead, but Keerson insists with his dying breath that Henderson has only "freed" him.

COMMENTARY: From Canada comes *The Pyx*, a rather depressing descent into the last hours of a noble prostitute named Elizabeth (Karen Black) who is ultimately sacrificed in a satanic rite. Though the picture is dark, tedious, heavy, and mired in an uninteresting police procedural format (fronted by a bored-looking Christopher Plummer), *The Pyx* nonetheless has some substance to it, and even

aims to parallel its fallen heroine with Jesus Christ.

There are miscues aplenty in *The Pyx*. It opens with a dreadful folk song written and performed (or warbled...) by Karen Black herself. The lyrics in this tune and others (such as: "It all turned out like I planned it, if I planned it, but I didn't plan it...") are circular to the point of insanity, and uniformly embarrassing. In addition, some of the supporting actors don't seem comfortable with English. True, the dialogue is mostly awkward but it could have passed muster if more smoothly delivered. And, on top of these flaws, *The Pyx* could have been improved by omitting Plummer's character (Henderson), and his lackluster investigation. The good detective never achieves three dimensions, often coming off as that old "hard boiled" cliché that Hollywood loves so much.

In point of fact, Henderson needed to go on an inner journey too. Merely solving Elizabeth's death is not enough, since Henderson is one of the two leads in the picture. How does he feel about Elizabeth? Her death? Her life? Her choice of careers? How is he changed by his involvement in her case? The audience is never let in on Henderson's thoughts in these matters, and so he remains remote. The climax of the film, which reveals that Henderson is actually confronting a "real" satanic evil as much as a human one, intimates that more could have been investigated in this man. A cult leader looks into him, and somehow sees that Henderson was glad when his wife died in a car accident. That's quite a surprise, and maybe *The Pyx* should have stressed Henderson's personality and emotional complexity more broadly.

Even if *The Pyx* could have done without her vocal stylings, it does benefit strongly from Black's acting presence in the other lead role. She has a sad countenance here, and the film makes the most of her soulful, sad look. And Black has been given an interesting character to play. Although the movie starts with Elizabeth's death, as her body falls from a high rise skyscraper, the flashbacks of the film take her from the role of fallen woman to Christ-like savior.

As *The Pyx* commences, Elizabeth is fallen, both literally and metaphorically. Not only has her body crashed from a great height, but Elizabeth is a lapsed Catholic, a prostitute who sells her body to men. In a scene set in a church, a guilty looking Black gazes

longingly at Catholic religious icons, and desires to take communion, but is visually separated from this rite of redemption by a physical barrier, a gate. This obstacle visually symbolizes Black's status as seeking salvation, cut off from it, and in need of redemption.

That redemption comes for Elizabeth when she seeks to save the souls of others. In this pursuit, the film clearly wants to establish Elizabeth as a Christ figure. She is thus canonized in *The Pyx* in both dialogue and action. "I looked up ... *she* was there" states an awe-filled homosexual who had contemplated suicide until receiving counseling from the sage Elizabeth.

More to the point, Elizabeth willfully takes the place of a "good" girl, the innocent Sandra, in the cult of death, thus ascending to a point of sainthood. When Black's character is dragged against her will into the satanic rite, the film is also establishing her as martyr. The Satanists substitute for the Romans, and the satanic rite substitutes for Crucifixion, but the result is the same. Elizabeth is "saved" by her good deed. She dies for the sins of a world that led her into prostitution and made a place for such evil.

In its depiction of a life of despair (drugs, joyless sex, serial dissatisfaction and unhappiness) wherein only a meaningful death can save and give life purpose, *The Pyx* is a deeply sad, and deeply Catholic picture. There was once a woman named Elizabeth; her life was valuable, even if she did not treat it that way, and now it is over. To her, saving a friend's life was more important than continuing her own flawed existence. In an age of graphic violence in video games and on TV, this sober point about sacrifice is still worth making.

But *The Pyx* is not nearly artful enough in its approach to this stance. The symbolism is nice, and the ritual montage edited to a speeded-up Gregorian chant is disturbing, but the general feeling of the film mimics Christopher Plummer's detachment. It is ho-hum, and Black's death, revealed in the opening frames, casts a pall over the remainder of the film.

The Satanic Rites of Dracula (1973) * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Count Dracula); Peter Cushing (Lorimar Van Helsing); Michael Coles (Inspector Murray); William Franklyn (Torrence); Freddie Jones (Professor Julian Keeley); Joanna Lumley (Jessica Van Helsing); Richard Vernon (Mathews); Patrick Barr (Lord Carradine); Barbara Yu Ling (Chin Yang); Lockwood West (Freeborne); Richard Mathews (John Porter); Maurice O'Connell (Hanson); Valerie Van Ost (Jane); Peter Adair (Doctor); Maggie Fitzgerald, Pauline Peart, Finnuala O'Shannon, Mia Martin (Girls); John Harvey (Commissionaire); Marc Zuber (Guard #1); Paul Weston (Guard #2); Ian Dewar (Guard #3); Graham Rees (Guard #4).

CREW: *Assistant Director:* Derek Whitehurst. *Camera Operator:* Eric Anstiss. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Rebecca Breed. *Construction Manager:* Ken Softley. *Sound Recordist:* Claude Hitchcock. *Continuity:* Elizabeth Wilcox. *Hairdresser:* Maude Onslow. *Dubbing Mixer:* Dennis Whitlock. *Special Effects:* Les Bowie. *Sound Editor:* Terry Poulton. *Make-up:* George Blackler. *Assistant Art Director:* Don Picton. *Casting Director:* James Liggat. *Production Manager:* Ron Jackson. *Art Director:* Lionel Couch. *Editor:* Chris Barnes. *Associate Producer:* Don Houghton. *Director of Photography:* Brian Probyn. *Music:* John Cacauas. *Music Supervisor:* Philip Martell. *Screenplay:* Don Houghton. *Produced by:* Roy Skeggs. *Directed by:* Alan Gibson. A Hammer Production made at EMI/MGM Elstree Studios, Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running time:* 86 minutes.

P.O.V.

“It was poor.... The producers were desperately trying to update Dracula. He was made the head of

a corporation... Dreadful. Oh, how I fought that. It was very sad for me to see the role deteriorate from film to film”²¹.—Christopher Lee sounds off on the “revisionist” Count Dracula of *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973).

SYNOPSIS: In 1973, a British agent escapes a satanic cult, and is rescued by fellow government agents. He dies shortly thereafter, but not before informing his superiors that several high-ranking members of the British government and business community are involved in a satanic cult.

Dr. Lorimar Van Helsing, professor of the occult, is brought in to consult on the case, along with his beautiful granddaughter, Jessica. Van Helsing is shocked to learn that an old college friend, Dr. Keeley, is involved in the cult. He speaks with his friend to ascertain his level of involvement in the dark matter. Keeley seems shaken, confused and downright out of his mind about the project he has been working on. Van Helsing learns, to his horror, that Keeley has developed a new strain of bubonic plague, more virulent than any yet imagined by man. A cultist sniper shoots Van Helsing after learning the truth, but Van Helsing is only knocked unconscious. He awakens some time later to find Keeley hanged.

Inspector Murray and Jessica investigate the house where the cult is headquartered. Jessica finds the sleeping chambers of several vampire females, and is surrounded by them. Murray rescues her, and they flee the premises, pursued by Satanists on motorcycles.

Van Helsing soon realizes they are facing a master of the undead, Count Dracula himself, and his ultimate plot to destroy mankind. A satanic equinox is rapidly approaching, a time in which the Prince of Darkness commands the balance of power. At this time, Dracula plans to release a plague that will destroy humanity.

Jessica and Murray stake out the Palomar cultist house, while Van Helsing prepares silver bullets with which to ward off the vampire. Jessica and Murray are captured by cultists and held hostage, as Van Helsing visits a rich industrialist named Denham, the front man, and moneybags, for the cult. Denham, of course, is Dracula himself. Like his granddaughter, Van Helsing is captured.

Incarcerated at the Palomar house, Murray awakens in a dungeon just in time to stake one of Dracula's brides. He then kills the other brides by activating a sprinkler system, and dousing the undead with running water. Meanwhile, Dracula wants Van Helsing to watch as he makes Jessica his consort. Then, Dracula decides to expose Van Helsing to the plague. As a fire starts, Murray rescues Jessica, and Van Helsing and Dracula face off one last time. Van Helsing leads Count Dracula into a thicket, and ushers the vampire to his death, impaled on thorns. Then Van Helsing finishes Dracula off with a good, old-fashioned, stake to the heart.

COMMENTARY: Without getting on too much of a high horse about it, it's pretty sickening what they've done to Count Dracula in *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*. In a move that inspires irritation, if not downright anger, the Transylvanian vampire has been transformed into a James Bond movie villain ... bent on world determination, and easily defeated. It's a crying shame.

It's also a surprise, since the resourceful Hammer Studios is behind this uninspiring update of the character. Dracula had served the studio well over the years, and had proven to be the headliner for a durable, long-lived franchise. After the lackluster *Scars of Dracula* (1970), the fun *Dracula AD 1972* updated the character by bringing him into contemporary London. Yet even that advance in setting was apparently not deemed enough to perpetuate a moribund franchise. Instead, this movie is all tacky trend and fad, as it cashes in on two kinds of popular contemporary film: the Satan movies (embodied by films such as *Brotherhood of Satan*, *Asylum of Satan*, and *Daughters of Satan*), and the long-lived James Bond film series. Like the latter franchise, this film features secret agents, a mission briefing, the efficient government secretary, gadgets, and otherworldly, Ken Adams-like set designs. Dracula is not just an evil vampire who drinks blood, he is a madman running a corporation who wants to unleash a plague across the Earth. It's Nosferatu by way of Blofeld. And it's wholly uninspiring.



Down for the count: Jessica Van Helsing (Joanna Lumley) sleeps under the gaze of Dracula (Christopher Lee) in *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973).

The thing about James Bond villains is they always lose, whether it's Goldfinger, Scaramanga, Blofeld, Renard or Drax. They're as disposable as paper towels, so why put the magnificent horror icon Dracula into the same category? Perhaps it was all just an elaborate audition. In 1974, Christopher Lee actually played a Bond villain in *The Man with the Golden Gun*...

Still, perhaps the overall idea of Dracula manipulating the business world to his own nefarious ends is not terrible in and of itself. In fact, it was the premise of *Dracula: The Series* in 1990. Yet even that relatively mundane TV series had the intelligence to equate Dracula's vampirism with corporate greed and yuppieism. There's no overriding context here, and *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* does not find much motivation for its action. Dracula apparently wants to release bubonic plague on the world to bring about "final peace." He wants to end his existence, and take the universe with him.

Well, if Dracula wants "final peace," can someone explain why he keeps coming back, again and again, after Van Helsing kills him? If

all the Christopher Lee/Hammer Dracula movies take place in the same universe, this vampire has had more than his fair shot at “final peace,” since he dies at the end of every movie, without fail. Couldn’t he just stay dead, rather than continue his cycle of death and resurrection?

As if the character motivation isn’t weak enough, director Gibson seems to have little clue about how to direct action. His camera is static most of the time, frozen and seemingly afraid to move. Besides which, why waste time with snipers and secret agents, when there’s a master vampire to be offed? If the audience wanted a James Bond film, presumably it would go to see one. When horror fans see a Dracula movie, they want to be scared. This installment just doesn’t deliver.

Also, it must be noted that the climax of this picture is as blatantly absurd as any scene Hammer ever committed to celluloid. Dracula is vanquished when he is chased into a thicket and beset by thorns. That’s right, he’s “stung” with thorny brush, and dies! Let’s re-cap then: vampires can be killed by electricity (*Scars of Dracula*), running water (*Dracula AD 1972*), impalings (*Dracula AD 1972*), and now thorns too? Jeez, why be afraid of this guy? It is to Hammer’s detriment that it has not only de-mythologized Dracula in this film, it has made him easily killable. This Dracula wouldn’t last a round with Buffy the vampire slayer, that’s for certain.

From desperation often comes inspiration. *Satanic Rites of Dracula* is clearly an attempt to do something different with Dracula, but it feels more like exploitation than a creative hail-mary pass. Next up for the franchise was 1974’s *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires*, which melded Hong Kong kung fu action with Hammer-style horror. It sounds absurd, but that movie is actually a lot better than the *Satanic Rites of Dracula*. This is the bottom of the Hammer barrel.

Scream, Blacula, Scream! (1973) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: William Marshall (Blacula); Don Mitchell

(Justin); Pam Grier (Lisa Fortier); Michael Conrad (Sheriff Harley Dunlop); Janee Michelle (Gloria); Lynn Moody (Denny); Barbara Rhoades (Elaine); Bernie Hamilton (Ragman); Richard Lawson (Willis); Arnold Williams (Louis); Van Kirksey (Professor Walston); Bob Minor (Pimp # 1); Al Jones (Pimp # 2); Eric Mason (Milt); Sybil Scotford (Librarian); Beverly Gill (Maggie); Don Blackman (Doll Man); Judith Elliotte (Prostitute); Dan Roth (Cop); Nicholas Worth (Dennis); Kenneth O'Brien (Joe); Craig Nelson (Sarge); James Payne (Attendant); Richard Washington (Cop #1); James Kingsley (Sgt. Williams); Arnita Bell (Woman).

CREW: American International Pictures and Samuel Z. Arkoff Present *Scream Blacula Scream*. *Director of Photography:* Isidore Mankofsky. *Edited by:* Fabien Tordjmann. *Post-Production Supervisor:* Salvatore Billitteri. *Music Composed by:* Bill Marx. *Title Song "Torment" Lyrics by:* Marilyn Lovell, *Music by:* Bill Marx. *Main Title:* Sandy Dvore. *Executive Producer:* Samuel Z. Arkoff. *Screenplay by:* Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig and Maurice Jules. *Story by:* Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig. *Produced by:* Joseph T. Naar. *Directed by:* Bob Kelljan. *Production Manager:* Frank Beetson. *Art Director:* Alfeo Bocchicchio. *Casting:* Joe Scully, Bernard Carneol. *Additional Editing:* Bruce Schoengarth and Kent Schafer. *Sound Effects Editor:* Edit International Ltd. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Services. *Color:* Movielab. *Locations:* Cinemobile Systems, Inc. *Opticals:* Imagic Inc. *Cars Furnished by:* Chrysler Corporation. *First Assistant Director:* Reuben Watt. *Second Assistant Director:* John Poer. *Camera Operator:* Ed Koons. *Sound Mixer:* Donald Johnson. *Set Decorator:* Chuck Pierce. *Script Supervisor:* Joyce King. *Wardrobe:* Ermon Sessions and Sandra Stewart. *Property Master:* Thomas Fairbanks. *Special Effects:* Jack DeBron, Jr. *Make-up:* Alan Snider. *Hairstylist:* Ruby Ford. *Music Editor:*

Ving Hershon. An American International Picture.
M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. Running Time: 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In a secret voodoo cult, a power struggle erupts over the priesthood. Big Willis thinks that, by rights, he should be the new leader, but his powerful mother died without naming a successor, and now the decision favors beautiful Lisa Fortier, a priestess herself, in a democratic vote. A defeated Willis seeks vengeance by conducting a dangerous fire ritual that will bring life back to the vampire known as Blacula. Using Blacula's bones, Willis resurrects the dark undead lord, and Blacula immediately bites Willis, turning him into a vampire slave. Willis is a particularly vain man, and is upset that he no longer casts a reflection. Blacula puts the fool in his place, and warns him that he exists only to serve Blacula's agenda. When two friends, Elaine and Lewis, visit Willis's house to pick him up for a party, Blacula strikes again, this time in tandem with the vampirized Willis.

Later, Blacula goes to the party instead of Willis, and encounters Lisa Fortier there. Befriending an African historian named Justin, Blacula also recognizes some ancient African jewelry which once belonged to his dynasty. After the party, Blacula expands his army, killing Gloria, Lisa's friend. The police arrive on the scene, and immediately suspect that Lisa's voodoo cult is involved in the unusual biting death. Meanwhile, Blacula kills two pimps who accost him on a street, and Willis vampirizes his own girlfriend.

The next evening, Lisa sits with Gloria's corpse, and the undead creature soon rises from her coffin to strike. Blacula intervenes, saving Lisa's life for a very special job. He needs her help because of her great voodoo powers, and warns his minions not to attack Lisa because she is under his protection. Still bearing a grudge, Willis attempts to defy Blacula, but the head vampire threatens to rip out Willis's "worthless heart" should he proceed with his plan of vengeance.

Meanwhile, Justin suspects that a vampire has killed Gloria and the others, and goes to the library to research the subject. After failing to convince the police of his theory, Justin narrows his search and comes to the conclusion that Blacula is his man. Justin confronts the undead lord with his suspicions at a tense meeting. Not wishing

to kill Justin, Blacula warns him to abandon his theories lest he find himself in mortal danger. After the encounter, Blacula informs Lisa that he wants her to exorcise the demonic monster dwelling within him, and restore his humanity before he kills again. Lisa agrees to help Blacula find redemption, and starts to conduct the voodoo ritual. Unfortunately, the police and Justin bear down on Blacula and his army of vampires just as the spell seems to be working. The police are unprepared for the vampire counter-attack, but Justin is prepared with pickets from a fence, and methodically stakes the undead creatures in their hearts.

When Justin ruins his restoration ritual, Blacula goes on a killing spree. Left with no choice if Justin is to survive, Lisa kills Blacula by jabbing an arrow through his voodoo doll effigy. An agonized Blacula dies, looking heavenward for release.

COMMENTARY: This sequel to 1972's *Blacula* also expands that film's subtext. The black vampire, again personified by the dignified William Marshall, is no villain, but a cursed man seeking redemption, a victim of white "enslavement." But despite its extension of this familiar material, *Scream, Blacula, Scream!* is no mere rehash. The first film had to concern itself with the business of "origin." The audience had to see how Blacula was created, and the overarching idea was to spin Dracula into an African-American context, but with all the same horror touches that viewers are familiar with.

While remaining consistent with the ideas informing its predecessor, *Scream, Blacula, Scream!* heads for new narrative territory with commendable focus. This time, the story revolves around Blacula's attempt to be fully restored to humanity. He hates being a vampire (read: a slave), and he kills men and women only to further his attempts at restoration. What's so interesting is that the film depicts a black culture that does not support this particular brother. Willis, and even the heroic Justin, fail to understand Blacula's motives, and interfere with his attempt to be redeemed. He is a tragic hero, undone by the lack of understanding of his own people.

Scream, Dracula, Scream! is at its best when it follows Blacula's forays into the streets of the contemporary world. There is a really

interesting scene wherein Blacula walks a city strip, stopping to gaze at the sights of modern life. This is a brand new world to him, and the movie pauses to acknowledge that. The movie's best moment comes, however, when Blacula confronts two pimps in the city. He chastises these black criminals for involving a black girl in prostitution. "You made a slave of your sister," he tells them. "You're slaves, imitating your slave masters." It's a chilling moment and Blacula, the regal outsider and former noble, is the only one who could say it and get away with it. This scene plays as an acknowledgment that some aspects of African-American society have imitated the worst parts of the corrupt white society. Blacula, a man enslaved by Dracula, recognizes what it means to enslave others, and is disappointed to see that "slavery," even sexual slavery, has survived in his own kind. This movie works because Blacula, the outsider, is allowed to comment on what he sees, and his perspective isn't as simple as "black and white."

In the first film, the white establishment (its law enforcement, in particular) was targeted for excluding and marginalizing black citizens. The sequel is even more bold, turning the mirror back on black society. It's an interesting and provocative tack to take. Racism and discrimination exist within the African-American community too, and *Scream, Blacula, Scream!* is an entertainment with enough smarts to realize that. It also makes a cogent point about exploitation. Blacula feeds on his brothers and sisters out of necessity. It's a curse he wishes to rid himself of. The pimps exploit their brothers and sisters out of greed, out of the desire to be rich. Willis is the same way: he's a power-hungry, wealth-craving tyrant.

It's clear that *Scream, Blacula, Scream!* desires to make Blacula the ultimate anti-hero, speaking out against injustices of any color, and William Marshall refines his performance here. He's more charming and more menacing, but also more the tragic figure. There's a great depth to his performance, a depth that is missing from films like *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*.

Also worthy of note is the fact that voodoo plays as large a role as vampirism in this film. It's another tacit acknowledgment that the history and culture of the black community is worth exploring. Vampirism may be a European horror, popularized by Hollywood,

but the tenants of voodoo are just as fascinating, and if, anything, this film takes an equal opportunity to mythologize this misunderstood (and much feared) religion.

Scream, Blacula, Scream! is fast-paced, jam-packed with impressive stunt work, and every bit the success as *Blacula*. Pam Grier is a gorgeous, involving heroine (as always), and the movie has visceral chills to match its story about enslavement. One can only wish Marshall might have donned the cape for a third and final outing. If the quality were kept as high as in this screen double feature, a franchise would have been cemented, probably well beyond the 1970s.

Silent Night, Bloody Night (1973) * ½

Cast & Crew

CAST: Patrick O'Neal (John Carter); James Patterson (Jeffrey Butler); Mary Woronov (Diane Adams); Astrid Heeren (Ingrid); John Carradine (Towman); Walter Abel (Mayor Adams); Fran Stevens (Tess); Walter Klavun (Sheriff Mason); Phillip Bruns (Wilfred Butler—1929); Staats Cotsworth (Voice of Wilfred Butler); Ondine (Chief Inmate); Tally Brown, Lewis Love, Harvey Cohen, Hetty NacLise, George Trakas, Susan Rothenberg, Cleo Young, Kristin Steen, Jack Smith, Leroy Lessane, Bob Darchi (Inmates); Candy Darling, Barbara Sand (Guests); Jay Garner (Dr. Robinson); Donelda Dunne (Marianne Butler at age 15); Michael Pendrey (Doctor); Lisa Richards (Maggie Daly); George Strus (Doctor); Grant Code (Wilfred Butler at age 80); Debbie Parness (Marianne Butler at age 8).

CREW: Ami Artzi and Cannon Releasing Corporation in Conjunction with Armor Films Incorporated Present a Cannon Production in Association with Jeffrey Konvitz Productions, a film by Theodore Gershuny, *Silent Night, Bloody Night*.

Director of Photography: Adam Giffard. *Color:* Deluxe. *Equipment:* Cameramart. *Sound:* Magnasound. *Screenplay by:* Theordore Gershuny, Jeffrey Konvitz, Ira Teller. *Editor:* Tom Kennedy. *Music:* Gershon Kingsley. *Produced by:* Jeffrey Konvitz, Ami Artzi. *Directed by:* Theodore Gershuny. *Art Director:* Henry Shrady. *Assistant Art Director:* Sam Bender. *Props:* Jim Walker. *Wardrobe:* Bill Christians. *Make-up:* Pat Pizza. *Hairstylist:* Neil Barbella. *Sound Recordist:* Bruce Perlman. *Sound Assistant:* Paul Bang. *Assistant Director:* Andrew Geygerson. *Assistant Cameraman:* Sal Guida. *Gaffer:* Aristides Pappidas. *Script Continuity:* Helga Petrashevics. *Grip:* Joe Bruck. *Production Assistants:* Jeff Kahan, Brad Pagota, Melanie Mintz, Thomas Sturges, Everett Sherman, Gary Rich. *Assistant to Producer:* Carole Sobel. *Sound Editor:* Nobuko Oganessoff. *Music Editor:* James Korris. *Assistant Editor:* Jonathan Kroll, Charles Baum. *Re-recording Engineer:* Raun Kirves. *Mixer:* Jack Cooley. *Special Effects:* Louis Antzes. *Title Design:* Sal Vitale, Hugh Valentine. *Associate Producers:* Frank Vitale, Lloyd Kaufman. A Cannon Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 83 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Silent Night, Bloody Night was terrible. We were given a weird script, and Ted [Gershuny] tried to spark it up. He tried to make it an artistic statement, but it didn’t work. It didn’t even make much sense. Most people couldn’t understand what was going on—which is not good, particularly for a horror film”²².—Mary Woronov, star of *Silent Night, Bloody Night*.

SYNOPSIS: On December 24, 1950, Wilfred Butler is set aflame in his own house, a former insane asylum. The coroner rules the death accidental, and the Butler house is willed to Butler’s young grandson. The grand house stands untouched for twenty years until

sold by Mr. Carter, a lawyer from the big city.

Carter meets with the town elders, who are quite suspicious about Carter's client, the Butler grandson. They also warn Carter not to stay in the house alone for the evening. He ignores their warnings and remains in the house with his mistress. While Carter and his mistress make love, a stranger breaks into their room and hacks them to pieces with an axe. The killer then phones the police to tell them Carter is "gone."

Young Jeffrey Butler arrives in town to check out the house he is selling after so many years. He meets the mayor's lovely daughter, Diane, and they plan to go to the house together to check it out. Meanwhile, the axe murderer kills Tess, the city telephone operator, who has also dropped by to check out the Butler place. Soon, other town elders (including the newspaper man and the sheriff) are being murdered with an axe for some dark reason.

Jeffrey finds his grandfather's diary and learns the truth. His mother, Maryann, was only a young girl when Wilfred, her own father, raped and impregnated her. Consequently, Maryann lost her grip on sanity. Hoping to rectify his terrible crime, Wilfred turned the Butler place into an asylum for the insane—believing Maryann could be cured there. But the doctors who came to the asylum were debauched and unwilling to help the sick. To redeem himself yet again, Wilfred released all the psychotic inmates, who promptly killed the doctors, and poor little Maryann too. Then, the inmates who killed both Maryann and the doctors became the town elders including Tess, the sheriff, and Diane's father, the mayor! Now, Wilfred is still alive and conducting his vengeance against the town elders for the murder of his daughter all those years ago!

When Jeffrey learns the truth, he confronts the mayor, and they end up killing each other in a shoot out, leaving Diane alone to confront Wilfred Butler ... who staged his own fiery demise in 1950.

COMMENTARY: Today, bad movies like *The Haunting* (1999) or *The House on Haunted Hill* (1999) cost tens of millions of dollars. *Silent Night*, *Bloody Night* manages to be just as terrible, but at a fraction of the cost. Therefore, some people might be tempted to see it as a bargain. After all, half way through a viewing of *The*

Haunting, the audience is still discerning that, underneath the all-star cast and the great special effects, the movie actually stinks.

Silent Night, Bloody Night is more honest, more blatant in its badness than that. It bears all those reassuring tell-tale signs of a bad movie, signs that today's garbage might avoid through expense: amateur editing and filming, bad sound, bad film stock, atrocious dialogue, and the rest. Still, at least you know where you stand with a movie like *Silent Night, Bloody Night*. It doesn't take long to realize that you're trapped in bad movie hell.

First off, a bit of editorial business: This is not a review of *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, the infamous slasher flick that highlighted a homicidal maniac dressed as Santa Claus. Instead, this is *Silent Night, Bloody Night*, the ultra-low-budget horror movie that probably only six or seven people in the world actually remember. Didn't want there to be any confusion about that.

Also, it seems only fair to note that other than the inclusion of the song *Silent Night* over the opening credits, this film has absolutely nothing to do with the holiday season. There's nary a Christmas decoration, tree or accouterment anywhere to be found. There's no suggestion at all, actually, that any of the events of this film take place on a holiday. It's just an exploitation title, pure and simple.

What follows the opening credits is a badly lit mess that is damned near impossible to follow. The film looks grainy, and appears to have been cut together by someone with attention deficit disorder. John Carradine is wasted in a nothing part, and events don't seem to connect. When does Tess die? When does Jeffrey leave Towman? Who is going where, and why? It's a really messed-up jumble of ideas that never connect to one another. Eventually, even the film gives up trying to understand itself, and voice-over exposition is added in an attempt to explain the over-complicated story. As a rule, voice-over narration of this extent is usually a bad sign, an indication that a movie needed to be rescued in post-production. *Silent Night, Bloody Night* adheres to that rule.

The film starts with one well-executed idea, a rehash of the famous *Psycho*/Janet Leigh trick, and then moves on to a strange tale that recalls *Don't Look in the Basement* by way of *An Enemy of the People*.

In other words, *Silent Night, Deadly Night* begins as though Patrick O'Neal is the star of the film. But, *surprise!*—he's not. About a quarter of the way through, he gets murdered in bed during a pretty well staged and brutal axe attack. From there, it's the old chestnut about loonies controlling the nuthouse, only this time, they actually control a whole town.

From what this reviewer can gather, this is the story: a man raped his daughter, felt bad, turned his house into an insane asylum, boarded her there, and let her be. The doctors at the asylum were bad, though, and the inmates killed them, and took over the nearby town. Now, years later, the father is back, and he's really mad because the inmates killed his daughter, and are now ensconced as the town elders. It's really two (bad) stories for the price of one: trauma in the 1930s (told in gloomy sepia tone), and a massacre in the 1970s (told in shades of dark and black). Any further examination of the film's plot could cause harmful side effects including (but not limited to) nausea, headaches, and confusion.

But at least *Silent Night, Bloody Night* is perfectly up front about its quality (or lack thereof). Watching it, one is reminded how bad movies have really changed since the '70s. Even the worst movies of today are technically competent (even extraordinary, in some cases). Even the worst films made today can be seen and heard adequately. Technology is always solid. Back in the '70s, rotten films like *Silent Night, Bloody Night* were rough, difficult to hear, and painful to watch. They were technologically incompetent, bungled in the editing, and so forth. Somehow, this approach seems more honest. One can at least buckle down early on, grit one's teeth, and get on with the business at hand, fully cognizant that pain will soon follow.

Sisters (1973) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...DePalma's most self-sufficient chiller to date in that his penchant for 'quoting' Hitchcock had not yet reached the level of parody that it would attain in his future films. Nor does he send up his story à

la Godard. The result is a film that is less characteristic of the future DePalma, but a more effective psycho-film because of it.”—John McCarty, *Psychos: Eighty Years of Mad Movies, Maniacs, and Murderous Deeds*, St. Martin’s Press, 1986, page 124.

“...Brian DePalma’s best film; it has humor and gore and is adept at balancing the two.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst, Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 125.

“...comes close enough to his [DePalma’s] underground films to remain one strange and scruffy piece of work; the final half hour set in a rural Bedlam is particularly bent.”—Ty Burr, *Entertainment Weekly*: “Hitchcraft,” January 15, 1993, page 56.

Cast & Crew

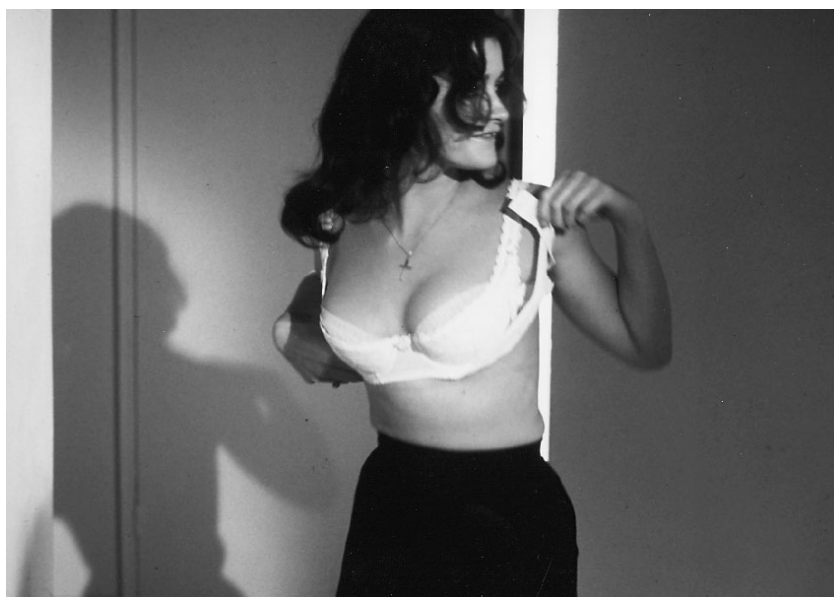
CAST: Margot Kidder (Danielle); Jennifer Salt (Grace Collier); Charles Durning (Larch); Bill Finley (Emile); Barnard Hughes (McClennon); Dolph Sweet (Lieutenant). With: Lisle Wilson, Mary Davenport.

CREW: American International Pictures and Pressman-Williams Present a Brian DePalma Film, *Sisters*. *Directed by:* Brian DePalma. *Assistant Director:* Alan Hopkins. *Unit Production Manager:* Jeffery Hayes. *Gaffer:* William W. Lister. *Casting Director:* Sylvia Fay. *Recordist:* Russell Arthur. *Sound Editor:* John Fox. *Associate Producer:* Lynn Pressman, Robert Richie. *Production Supervisor:* Louis A. Stroker. *Production Designer:* Gary Weist. *Director of Photography:* Gregory Sandor. *Editor:* Paul Hirsch. *Music:* Bernard Herrmann. *Screenplay by:* Brian DePalma and Louisa Rose. *From an Original Story by:* Brian DePalma. *Produced by:*

Edward R Pressman. *M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 90 minutes.*

SYNOPSIS: A beautiful model named Danielle appears on the local New York TV game show called *Peeping Toms*, and then goes out to dinner with a contestant, Philip Wood. Her strange ex-husband follows her to the restaurant, and makes a scene. A worried Philip takes Danielle home to Staten Island. And though her crazy husband stands watch outside her apartment, Danielle and Philip spend the night together. Philip fails to notice the terrible scar on Danielle's hip ... the spot where a co-joined twin was removed.

The next morning, Philip overhears Danielle talking to her sister, Dominique, in another room of the apartment. She seems a bit unhinged. Upset by the encounter, Danielle sends her new beau to the local pharmacy to fill a prescription. When Philip returns, he has brought a birthday cake for Danielle, but Dominique stabs him to death before Danielle can enjoy it.



A demented Dominique (Margot Kidder) disrobes in Brian DePalma's homage to Hitchcock, *Sisters* (1973).

Grace Collier, a nosy reporter who lives in an apartment building across from Danielle's, witnesses the crime and calls the police. Meanwhile, Danielle's husband Emile arrives and helps Danielle clean up Dominique's mess. They hide Philip's body in a sofa bed, and clean up as the police, skeptical of the reporter, delay Grace in the lobby. When they finally search Danielle's apartment, they find nothing suspicious.

Now Grace's reporter's instincts are aroused, and she follows a lead (Danielle's birthday cake) to the local bakery, and learns that Philip purchased it. With a hapless private detective named Larch at her side, she investigates further. Though disagreeing with Larch's methods, Grace works with him to illicitly get into Danielle's apartment. Danielle and Emile return to the dwelling while Larch is inside, but he evades detection even as they remove the sofa that hides the bloody evidence of murder.

Larch realizes the body is hidden in the sofa, and trails the truck transporting it. Grace looks at Dominique's stolen medical records and realizes she is a separated Siamese twin. Grace meets a writer who has written about these particular twins, and he shows her a video of the co-joined siblings. She sees their residence at the Loisel Institute, and learns that Dominique is psychologically damaged, dangerous. She watches as the separation is performed, and McClennon (the writer) reveals that the operation went badly, that Dominique didn't survive the surgery.

Grace pursues Emile and Danielle to a madhouse on Staten Island. Emile insists that Grace is a patient there, and has her held and drugged against her will. He attempts to hypnotize her into believing that there was no murder. As Grace soon learns, Danielle is schizophrenic. She becomes Dominique in her mind, and then becomes violent, just like her dead sister. Even as Grace is hypnotized, Danielle turns into Dominique and kills Emile. The police arrest Danielle, but Grace, a victim of Emile's mind programming, now insists there was no murder.

Meanwhile, Larch sits watching the sofa bed in rural Quebec, waiting for someone to pick it up.

COMMENTARY: For many years, Brian DePalma has been touted as

the “next Hitchcock” and his first thriller, *Sisters*, explains why. It’s an inspired, out-of-this world homage to the master’s *Psycho*. The “Janet Leigh trick,” that a lead character should die early in the film, is carried over here, as is a surprise twist in identity, and a focus on schizophrenia. But DePalma’s brilliance is revealed not so much in his contextual references to Hitchcock, but in his thorough understanding of film technique. In particular, he deploys split-screen photography to ends both dramatic and clever.

In 1976, Brian DePalma staged the climactic scenes of *Carrie* using split screens. There, he created a visual cause-and-effect relationship with opposing film frames. In one frame, Carrie would gaze at something. In the other frame, her psi energy would cause explosions, or other pyrotechnics. In *Sisters*, DePalma has somewhat different purposes. He uses the split screen to ease the audience through the transition from one protagonist to another.

As Philip lies dying in Danielle’s apartment, the image is split. On one side (filmed from inside the window) the audience sees Philip seeking help, dying. On the other side of the screen, from outside the window, viewers become aware that someone else is watching the bloody act, Grace Collier. As one protagonist dies then, another is simultaneously introduced. It is a visual passing of the torch.

DePalma also utilizes the split screen for purposes of contrast. In one sequence, Grace Collier and the detectives are seen arguing in the lobby in one half of the screen, while the bloody clean up of the murder in apartment 3R is depicted in the other screen. Here, “time” is the notion held in common between the two images. One image reveals time wasted, as the police delay Collier. The other image (Danielle and Emile’s hiding of evidence) reveals time used fruitfully.

In its totality, *Sisters* concerns a split. Danielle’s mind has split so as to accommodate two distinct, competing personalities. Her schizophrenic nature is reflected in DePalma’s pervasive use of the split screen. The audience is privy to two lives, two images simultaneously, just as Danielle is. It’s an oddly reflexive technique, but one that is used brilliantly. The film’s double vision reflects Danielle’s.

DePalma also understands irony and suspense, and how the two interrelate. In one tense moment, Grace sits down heavily on the sofa where Phillip's body is hidden. The camera pans down to a bloody spot on the back of the couch, and reveals information that the characters in the drama are not privy to. Will Grace see the spot? Will she discover the body? These are suspenseful questions that DePalma's camerawork raises. At the same time, the audience notes the irony: Grace's behind is very close to the quarry she seeks, if only she would notice.

Hitchcock blended suspense and irony like no director in film history, and DePalma orchestrates scenes towards similar ends. His film is designed for moments such as these, and it is clear he relishes them.

The direct references to other Hitchcock films are many. Danielle's struggle with "the Dominique within" echoes Norman's battle with his own internal "Mother" in *Psycho*. The very idea that people (like Grace) don't mind their own business, is a reflection of elements of both *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*. And, then, of course, there's the stunning violence, which Hitchcock included in all his best suspense films.

DePalma's unconventional sense of humor belies his admiration for Jean Luc Godard, and the final sequences of *Sisters* owe more to Godard's sensibilities than they do Hitchcock's. For instance, it is outrageously funny, and utterly purposeless, that Grace is ultimately undone by her curiosity. After harassing the police about a murder for the entirety of the film, the hypnotism causes Grace to suddenly do an about-face and declare that there has been no homicide. At the end of the film, she is not restored to her right mind ... she is completely muddled. That's how we leave her, and it's a development Hitchcock would never have permitted, and one reason why *Sisters* is more than a Hitchcock pastiche. DePalma's twin (one might say "split") sensibilities in *Sisters* (part Godard/part Hitchcock) make it simultaneously suspenseful and absurd, a potent, uncommon mix.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Strother Martin (Dr. Stoner); Dirk Benedict (David Blake); Heather Menzies (Kristine Stoner); Richard B. Shull (Dr. Daniels); Tim O'Connor (Kagen); Jack Ging (Sheriff); Kathleen King (Kitty); Reb Brown (Steve Randall); Ted Grossman (Deputy); Charles Seel (Old Man); Ray Ballard (Waggish Tourist); Brendan Burns (Jock # 1); Rick Brokner (Jock # 2); James Drum (Hawker # 1); Ed McCready (Hawker # 2); Frank Kowalksi (Hawker # 3); Ralph Montgomery (Hawker # 4); Michael Masters (Hawker # 5); Charlie Fox (Arvin Loy Deux); Felix Silla (Seal Boy); Nobel Craig (Tim/Snake Man); Bobbi Kige (Kootch Dancer); J.R. Clark (Station Attendant); Chip Potter (Postal Clerk).

CREW: A Zanuck/Brown Production. *Executive Producers:* Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown. *Screenplay by:* Hal Dresner. *Story by:* Dan Striepeke. *Produced by:* Dan Striepeke. *Directed by:* Bernard L. Kowalski. *Director of Photography:* Gerald Perry Finnerman. *Color:* Technicolor. *Art Director:* John T. McCormack. *Set Decorator:* Claire P. Brown. *Sound:* Waldon O. Watson, Melvin Metcalfe. *Technical Advisor:* Ray Folson. *Animals Furnished by:* Hamosa Reptile, and Wild Animal Farm, Inc. *Film Editor:* Robert Watts. *Unit Production Manager:*

Doc Herman. *Assistant Director:* Gordon Webb. *Second Assistant Director:* Charles Dismates. *Titles and Opticals:* Elkin/Universal. *Creative Make-up Design:* John Chambers, Nick Marcellino. *Graphic Montage:* John Newhart. *Music:* Pat Williams. *Associate Producer:* Robert Butner. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 90 minutes.

“All the reptiles shown in this film are real. The King Cobras were imported from Bangkok, the Python from Singapore. We wish to thank the cast and crew for their courageous efforts while being exposed to extremely hazardous conditions.”—the opening card of *Ssssss* (1973).

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Stoner, a professor obsessed with snakes, goes to see Dr. Daniels at the local university to request an extension of his grant, and the help of one of the students for the summer. Daniels recommends the contemplative David Blake, and Blake soon goes to work with Stoner, befriending his beautiful daughter, Kristine, as well as his huge boa constrictor, Harry.

Stoner familiarizes David with his lab and his menagerie of rare snakes. He then introduces a series of “immunization” shots to David, claiming it is a protective measure. In fact, Stoner’s work involves evolution and the survival of man. He believes man would survive better as a cold-blooded, snake-like creature. He transformed his last assistant, Tim, into a snake-hybrid and then sold him to a local freak show. Soon, David feels the effects of the inoculations, and begins to feel sick.

Soon after David’s arrival, Stoner stages a public demonstration of his skill with snakes, extracting the venom of a dangerous king cobra. Days later, David’s skin begins to peel, and Stoner insists it is a normal reaction to the injections. The police visit Stoner and question him about his last assistant, Tim McGraw, who has officially disappeared. Meanwhile, David and Kristine grow close and skinny dip together in the nearby lake. When they go out on a date to the carnival, David sees Tim—a half-man/half-snake—and is bothered by his appearance.

A local bully, Steve, then confronts David, trying to make time with Kristine. The police break up the fight, but Steve attacks again later, attempting to sexually assault Kristine in her bedroom. Harry the snake defends her, but Steve kills the snake. Angry, Dr. Stoner follows Steve home, and leaves a poisonous snake in the shower. Steve is killed quickly by the critter

David and Kristine become intimate, but Dr. Stoner catches them

fooling around and grows angry. The next morning, David awakes to discover that his face has changed. Stoner claims it is an allergic reaction to the shots, but David's transformation to snake-man continues as Kristine leaves town to pick up a rare snake.

When the university cuts off support for Dr. Stoner's experiments, Stoner abducts Dr. Daniels and locks him in a basement with a boa constrictor.

Kristine happens by the carnival, suspicious about the snake-man, and recognizes Tim. Worried about David, she returns home. By now, David has turned into a full-fledged king cobra snake. Meanwhile, Stoner is bitten while attempting to catch another snake, and is killed by the venom. When Kristine is threatened by David, now completely hostile in his snakish demeanor, the police kill the strange creature.

COMMENTARY: Sssssss is an absurd but highly entertaining film that is saddled with a terrible title. The film features some fine B movie acting, some interesting ideas about snakes, and some really dangerous-looking stunts involving the main actors. On the negative side, Sssssss is stuck with a weak ending (highlighted by some dopey time-lapse special effects), and a few derivative moments.

Dirk Benedict (*Battlestar Galactica* [1978]), Heather Menzies (*Logan's Run* [1977], *Piranha* [1978]) and Strother Martin (*Brotherhood of Satan* [1971]) give this material their all, and attempt to create memorable, or at least interesting characters. Benedict and Menzies are particularly appealing as the young couple in love, and Benedict's only flaw is that he seems too smart to play so dumb a person. As *Battlestar Galactica* also proved, Benedict has an intelligent, witty screen persona, and that high level of charm and intellect carries over into this film ... which nonetheless requires him to be stupid throughout.



Heather Menzies and Dirk Benedict share a happy moment before the terror of *Sssssss* (1973) slithers into full swing.

But kudos to the cast for a willingness to interact (on camera) with a variety of wriggly, and apparently dangerous, snakes. Accordingly, some of the snake footage is rather startling. Strother Martin, in particular, really handles these snakes like a pro, even while mouthing tongue-tying scientific dialogue. Martin's is a bravura B-movie performance, and one that heightens the reality of the movie significantly.

And, to its benefit, Sssssss has some pretty heady stuff on its mind. The film unconventionally views snakes as a minority group, victims of dangerous generalizations and stereotypes, a viewpoint that the title character of *Stanley* would have no doubt appreciated. It then notes that snakes are also a cultural icon representing “evil.” There was a serpent, after all, in the Biblical garden. And that fact raises the question, is Stoner doing God’s work, or the Devil’s? This metaphor is carried over when David Blake starts to feel the effect of snake “blood” in his own veins. He experiences a dream that features Biblical images of Heaven and Hell, as if the snake is really a religious symbol, rather than just an animal. This may sound preposterous, but the connection to myth grants the film a little bit of class.

But, negatively, the film also genuflects to the king of this genre, 1971’s *Willard*. The “nice” snake in Sssssss is named Harry, but might as well be Socrates, the moniker of the “nice” rat in *Willard*, who also met with an unpleasant fate. Also, after some great make-up and special effects of a half-devolved snakeman, Sssssss loses credibility in literally its final moment, by showcasing (in time-lapse photography, no less) Benedict’s transformation into a creature that looks a lot like a glow-worm. As the movie has been building toward this metamorphosis, its inherent silliness kills much of the suspense and interest.

But, if you want to see a snake fight a mongoose, or coil around in angry parries, this is your movie. It’s a lot better than that other snake movie of the ’70s, *Stanley* (1972).

Tales That Witness Madness

Cast & Crew

CAST: Donald Pleasence (Dr. Tremayne); Jack Hawkins (Dr. Nicholas); Georgia Brown (Faye); Donald Houston (Sam); Joan Collins (Bella); Michael Jayston (Brian).

CREW: *Directed by:* Freddie Francis. *Written by:* Jay Fairbank. *Produced by:* Norman Priggen, Milton

Subotsky. *Director of Photography*: Norman Warwick. *Film Editor*: Bernard Gribble. *Music*: Bernard Ebbinghouse. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 90 minutes.

DETAILS: It's *Asylum* (1972) redux, as another Amicus anthology is set inside a mental institution. There are four stories this time, only barely connected thematically. The stories, "Mr. Tiger," "Mel," "Penny Farthing" and "Luau," unfold as star Donald Pleasence encounters four deranged inmates.

Theatre of Blood (1973) * * * ½

Critical Reception

"Some of the do-ings are funnily horrible as director Douglas Hickox uses his DeLuxe color cinematography to emphasize Robert Morley's outrageously blond hairdo as well as all the blood flowing.... If you know the Shakespeare plots, you'll get some fun trying to guess how scripter Anthony Greville-Belle has adapted them for each murder."—Deirdre Mack, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIV, Number 6, June-July 1973, page 379.

"Comedy-horror that really does give Vincent Price a chance to show his stuff, with deliciously absurd results ... but unfortunately the overlong script eventually runs out of steam, and the ending is feeble."—David Pirie, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 903.

"The movie is bright and, a good deal of the time, quite funny. It is farce as broad as Shaftesbury Avenue, but its high spirits are not entirely consistent with the great gobs of gore that director Douglas Hickox leaves smeared about."—Jay Cocks, *Time*, May 21, 1973, page 70.

"Few horror films are written with English majors

in mind, but ... *Theatre of Blood* surely can make such a claim... Director Douglas Hickox skillfully handles the material, allowing his camera to bear witness as Price steals the show, gliding between delightfully over-the-top camp and sheer irony.... But what is most intriguing about *Theatre of Blood* is the extent to which it can be said to have influenced some of the best modern offerings.”—Gina McIntyre, *Wicked*, Volume 3, Number 1, Spring 2001, pages 74–75.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Vincent Price (Edward Lionheart); Diana Rigg (Edwina Lionheart); Ian Hendry (Peregrine Devlin); Harry Andrews (Trevor Dickman); Coral Browne (Chloe Moon); Robert Coote (Oliver Larding); Jack Hawkins (Solomon Psalter); Michael Hordern (George Maxwell); Arthur Lowe (Horace Sprout); Robert Morley (Meredith Merridew); Dennis Price (Hector Snipe); Diana Dors (Rosemary); Madeline Smith (Maisie Psalter); Joan Hickson (Mrs. Sprout); Renee Asherson (Mrs. Maxwell); Milo O'Shea (Inspector Boot); Eric Sykes (Sgt. Dogge); Bunny Reed, Peter Thornton (Policemen); Charles Sinnickson (Vicar); Brigid Erin Bates (Maid); Meth Drinkers (Tutte Lemkow, Stanley Bates, Eric Francis, Sally Gilmore, John Gilpin, Joyce Graeme, Jack Maguire, Declan Mulholland (Meth Drinker).

CREW: *Director of Photography:* Wolfgang Suschitzky. *Camera Operator:* Ronnie Taylor. *Editor:* Malcolm Cooke. *Color:* DeLuxe. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Michael J. Lewis. *Screenplay:* Anthony Greville-Bell. *Based on an Idea by:* Stanley Mann and John Kohn. *Executive Producers:* Gustav Berne and Sam Jaffe. *Produced by:* John Kohn and Stanley Mann. *Directed by:* Douglas Hickox. *Production Manager:* David Anderson. *Continuity:* Angela Allen.

Set Decorator: Ann Mollo. *Construction Manager:* Peter Verrand. *Wardrobe Assistant:* Terry Smith. *Assistant to Producers:* Sarah Romilly. *Sound Mixer:* Simon Kaye. *Sound Editor:* Lois Wiggins. *Dubbing Mixer:* Douglas Turner. *Make-up:* George Blackler. *Hairdresser:* Pearl Tipaldi. *Assistant Editor:* Chris Kelly. *Stunts:* Terry York. *Special Effects:* John Stears. *Choreographer:* Tutte Lemkow. Filmed on Location in London, England, by Cineman Films Limited. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 105 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Edward Lionheart has spent twenty glorious years on the British stage proving himself to be the greatest Shakespearean actor of his generation. Unfortunately, the critics don't like Lionheart's work, and repeatedly snub him. Then comes the ultimate humiliation. After an incredible year of performing Shakespeare, Lionheart loses the Critics Circle Actor of the Year Award to a marbles-in-his-mouth method actor! Humiliated, Lionheart confronts the Critics Circle and, finally, throws himself over a ledge in defeat.

Then, on March 15, 1972, critic George Maxwell is killed in a brutal crime that resembles Caesar's stabbing death at the hands of the Senate in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Occurring on the ides of March, this terrible murder sends ripples of fear through the Critics Circle, including the youngest and most fit of the reviewers, Peregrine Devlin. The police are soon investigating the incident, but are too late to prevent the death of a second critic, Hector Snipes. Snipes is stabbed with a spear and then displayed at a funeral, his corpse dragged from a horse's tail and torn apart. Oddly, this death mimics exactly Hector's death in *Troilus and Cressida*!

Convinced that someone is killing the critics of London, Peregrine Devlin confronts Edwina Lionheart, thespian daughter of the deceased Edward Lionheart. Could she be the culprit? Edwina denies any knowledge of the murders and claims that her father died of a broken heart.

Before long, more critics are dying. One is decapitated as he sleeps, in an elaborate re-enactment of *Cymbeline*, and another has his

heart, “a pound of flesh,” removed in an odd re-working of *The Merchant of Venice*. Though the police are reluctant to believe it, Edward Lionheart is still alive and, with demented glee, re-staging his last season of Shakespeare dramas with a bloody twist. His murder of the critics is his final revenge for losing the Critics Actor of the Year Award.

Refusing to believe that Lionheart is still alive, the police arrest Edwina for the crimes. However, Devlin assures her release when he survives a face-to-face fencing duel with Lionheart in his gym (in a re-enactment of the duel from *Romeo and Juliet*). The police release Edwina and put security around all the survivors of the Critics Circle, but even that is not enough to stop the great actor, Lionheart! Using *Othello* as his template, Lionheart spurs a jealous reviewer to murder his wife in a fit of jealousy. Another critic, Chloe Moon, is electrocuted in an updated version of Joan of Arc’s burning at the stake from *Henry VI*.

Finally, in the most gruesome crime yet, fat stage critic Meredith Merridew is force-fed his pet poodles and stuffed to death in a scene inspired by *Titus Andronicus*.

The sole survivor of the Critics Circle, Devlin, is captured by Edwina, who has been cooperating with her father’s crazy plans all along. Devlin is taken to Lionheart’s den, an abandoned theater, and forced to re-stage the Critics Circle Awards. If Devlin fails to name Lionheart the best actor of the year, he will meet the same fate as Gloucester in *King Lear*: blinded with hot knives!

Devlin refuses to overturn his choice, and angry Lionheart prepares to deliver retribution. The police arrive just in time, and soon the theater catches fire. In a terrible moment, Edwina dies at the hands of Lionheart’s crazy audience, all homeless meth drinkers. As Devlin flees Lionheart’s theater of blood, the mourning Lionheart takes his dead daughter in his arms and climbs to the roof. As the building burns, Lionheart plunges through the roof and lands in the theater far below, only to die amidst the flames.

COMMENTARY: Vincent Price handily steals the show in *Theatre of Blood*, a wicked and droll variation on the *Dr. Phibes* formula. This time, Price plays a “hammy” actor belittled by snobby critics. He

takes bloody revenge, and in the process satirizes the world of theater, and quotes plenty of Shakespeare. It's all highly amusing, inventive stuff, and if this reviewer can indulge in a personal confession, he enjoyed *Theatre of Blood* more than either *Phibes* films. The film's knowing self-reference to the world of theater (and its critics) makes for a cutting and delightful horror film.

In *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, Price's character killed his enemies by re-creating the 10 curses of the Pharaohs. In *Theater of Blood*, Edwin Lionheart stages the death of his opponents by re-framing the many works of William Shakespeare. Thus *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III* all get a horror re-vamp. These innovative reinterpretations and staging of the Bard's classic work might have snooty scholars spinning with dismay, but they are undeniably clever. Especially enjoyable is the ridiculous duel scene (set in a gymnasium) that quotes from *Romeo and Juliet*, but yet finds the zeal to include uneven bars, the balance beam, and a trampoline.

This scene, like most of the rest in the film, is done with a perfect sense of lightness. There may be deaths occurring, but *gosh, darnit*, it's all in good fun. This film represents the spirit the later *Elm Street* movies often went for, and missed.

No doubt that part of the reason the murders are so amusing in *Theatre of Blood* is that the victims are critics. This film has a wholly appropriate dislike of critics. First off, the film cleverly gives them names that epitomize their worst qualities. One is named Snipe, another Dickman, another Larding. These funny names reveal the nasty personalities of the murder victims. The film also notes of critics that they lack the "ability to create," and who would disagree with that assessment? Basically, *Theatre of Blood* sees critics as nasty, bitter, little people, and therefore the revenge conducted against them is venomously conceived, ferociously written and executed, and well-deserved. One feels true sympathy for Price's character. Like many talents who perform or write, he keeps all of his bad reviews ... and remembers every word. That's one reason why critics probably should tread lightly, yet most often don't. There are people behind films, books, plays, et cetera, and those

people can be fragile. It seems only appropriate that the act of “criticizing” should be punished when practiced so callously.

Ironically, in giving nasty critics their comeuppance, *Theatre of Blood* is also probably critic-proof. What bad can a critic say about it, really? It’s funny, amusing, knowledgeable, and witty; the perfect self-reflexive horror film. In addition to its satirical qualities, the movie is filled with amusing moments. In one, the (not-so) great Shakespearean actor loses an award to a Brando-like method actor. In another, Vincent Price plays a gay hairdresser, and sports an afro. It sounds bizarre, but it is all part of this film’s wacky tapestry.

Which brings the discussion, inevitably, to Vincent Price himself. Some horror fans haven’t watched his work lately because they’ve been obsessed with slasher films or the like. Without getting on a soapbox or anything, they really ought to watch this man at work. He plays comedy flawlessly, yet also brings a tragic (one might say Shakespearean...) pathos to Lionheart. Though he is clearly insane, the audience never hates this character. He is pitiable, and to some degree at least, the audience sympathizes with his grievances. Price chews on every word, every line, as if he is having the time of his life, and he carries the film from start to finish. He is positively buoyant, lifting the humorous material to legitimately hilarious heights.

Theatre of Blood is a happy confection of blood, murder, and death, and the only reason it doesn’t merit four stars is that this author would hate to support any anti-critic trend. He has to make a living, after all.

The Touch of Satan

Cast & Crew

CAST: Michael Berry (Jodie Thompson); Emby Mellay (Melissa Strickland); Lee Amber (Luther Strickland); Yvonne Winslow (Mary Strickland); Jeanne Gerson (Lucinda Strickland); Robert Easton (Keitel).

CREW: *Directed by:* Don Henderson. *Written by:* James E. McLarty. *Produced by:* George E. Carey. *Director of Photography:* Jordan S. Cronenweth. *Film Editor:* Dick Elliott. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approximate).

DETAILS: In this Dundee Production, a freewheeling wanderer (Bellay) befriends a beautiful girl (Mellay) only to discover her family hides a terrible secret: a murderous old witch who kills local farmers with a pitchfork. As the wanderer soon learns, witchcraft runs in the family. *The Giant Spider Invasion's* (1975) Robert Easton has a cameo during a "burning at the stake"-style flashback.

The Vault of Horror

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tom Baker (Moore); Denholm Elliott (Dillant); Daniel Massey (Rogers); Anna Massey (Donna); Michael Craig (Maitland); Edward Judd (Alex); Curg Jurgens (Sebastian); Dawn Addams (Inez); Jasmina Hilton (Indian Girl); Glynis Johns (Eleanor);

CREW: *Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker. *Written by:* Milton Subotsky. *Director of Photography:* Denys Coop. *Film Editor:* Oswald Hafenrichter. *Produced by:* Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. An Amicus Production, released by Cinerama. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 86 minutes.

DETAILS: This is the Amicus sequel to the successful *Tales from the Crypt* (1972). It features the stories "Midnight Mess" (about a vampire dining club ... with blood on tap), "Neat Job" (a revenge story about a married couple), "This Trick'll Kill You" (about a magician hoping to steal a colleague's magic trick), "Bargain in Death" (concerning a man who scams himself out of life), and "Drawn and Quartered" (which focuses on an artist who used voodoo to smite his enemies). Generally considered less successful artistically than its predecessor.

1974

Abby

Cast & Crew

CAST: Carol Speed (Abby Williams); William Marshall (Bishop Williams); Terry Carter (Reverend Emmett Williams); Austin Stoker (Cass Potter); Charles Kissinger (Dr. Hennings).

CREW: *Directed by:* William Girdler. *Written by:* William Girdler and Gordon Cornell Layne. *Produced by:* William Girdler, Gordon Cornell Layne, and Mike Henry. *Director of Photography:* William Asman. *Film Editors:* Henry Asman, Corky Ehlers. *Music:* Robert O'Ragland. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

DETAILS: A terrific African-American cast sinks its teeth into this William Girdler blaxploitation spin on *The Exorcist*. Though not well reviewed when released, this is today considered a cult classic. Girdler regular Kissinger teams with Stoker (*Assault on Precinct 13* [1976]), *Blacula* star William Marshall, and a scenery-chewing Carol Speed to dramatize the tale of a bishop's daughter who becomes possessed by evil. If so inclined, one can actually read a great deal into this one. When possessed, Abby becomes a nymphomaniac, a bad girl. It's up to her stern father to set her straight. Demonic possession, adolescent rebellion, or more exploitation from the prolific Girdler? You decide.

*Andy Warhol's Dracula (1974) * **

Critical Reception

"Innuendoes of kinky sex followed by disingenuous banalities are the familiar spices of *Andy Warhol's Dracula* ... X-rated like its predecessor, *Dracula* is

far less bloody ... considerably sexier and more consistently amusing.”—Charles Michener, *Newsweek*: “Down for the Count,” February 24, 1975, page 83.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joe Dallesandro (Mario); Udo Kier (Count Dracula); Arro Juering (Anton); Aron Uvera, Maxime McKendr, Dominique Darel, Stefania Casini, Silvia Dionisio, Emi Califri, Vittorio De Sica.

CREW: *Photography:* Luigi Kuveiller. *Production Designer:* Enrico Job. *Music:* Claudi Gizzi. *Editing:* Franca Silvi, Jed Johnson. *Continuity:* Silvia Petroni. *Art Director:* Gianni Giovaghon. *Special Effects:* Carlo Rambaldi. *Producer:* Andrew Baunsberg. *Written and Directed by:* Paul Morrissey. *Production Manager:* Mara Blasetti. *Cameraman:* Ubaldo Terzano. *Wardrobe:* Bernito Persico. *Make-up:* Mario DeSalvio. *First Assistant Editor:* Loretta Mattioli. *Sound Mixer:* Carlo Palmieri. *Technical Consultant for Spacevision:* Robert V. Bernier. *First Production Assistant:* Vasio Mafera. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* X. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Romania, Count Dracula is dying. He needs the blood of virgins to survive, and so decides to move to Italy with his assistant, Anton, where there is apparently an abundance of the virtuous.

The vampire and his beard arrive in an Italian hotel, and learn that there is an aristocratic family nearby with four unwed daughters. Anton meets with the family and secures a room in the home for Dracula so he can interview the daughters as prospective brides. To help prepare for this opportunity, Dracula eats a loaf of bread drenched in the blood of a virgin who died in a road accident.

Dracula has an unpleasant surprise in store for him. Two of the daughters he plans to court are not virgins at all, but are being

repeatedly laid by the hunky Communist farmhand, Mario. When Dracula arrives at the villa, he is introduced to the girls, unsuspecting. They are not particularly interested in him because he is so pale and weak, but the count nonetheless resolves to get his fill of them as soon as possible. He dines on one daughter, but becomes violently ill when he realizes she is not a virgin, and that her blood is contaminated.

Dracula then dines on daughter number two, with the same unpleasant result. Dracula finally resorts to feasting on Esmerelda, the eldest of the four daughters. She is a spinster but ... a virgin.

Meanwhile, the youngest daughter, barely fourteen, realizes that Dracula is a vampire, and that he intends to feed on her. Mario offers to relieve her of her virginity, the only way to make her unpalatable to the vampire. She gladly accepts his offer.

Mario and Dracula soon fight it out, the common man versus the vampire aristocrat. Anton is killed in a tussle with Esmerelda's mother, who also dies in the battle. Mario chops off Dracula's arms, rendering him impotent. Esmerelda attempts to defend her vampire lover, but Mario drives a stake through his heart. Seeing Dracula dead, Esmerelda impales herself on Dracula's death spike, leaving Mario and the youngest of four daughters to carry on.

COMMENTARY: Here's a movie that unfolds like a dirty joke. What happened when the vampire went looking for a virgin to eat? Well, he met a family with four daughters. The first one wasn't a virgin. The second wasn't a virgin either. And so on, and so forth....

It's a ridiculous premise for a horror film, but director Morrissey is apparently all too aware that *Andy Warhol's Dracula* is a campy joke. The film doesn't take itself very seriously, but nor is it particularly amusing, except in apparently unintentional fashion. Most of all, there's an overriding sense of carelessness to the film. It looks and sounds thrown together, and indeed, some accounts of making of the film suggest the script was improvised day to day. It shows.

Udo Kier makes for an unusual Dracula, and for that matter, *Andy Warhol's Dracula* has some interesting ideas about the famous count.

He can survive in sunlight and even touch a crucifix, but he needs the blood of virgins (or “wirgins,” as Kier pronounces the word) to survive. This Dracula is not the creature of strength and power that moviegoers are used to, but one of impotence instead. He is wheeled about in a wheelchair, unable to move on his own two feet. He appears anemic, and is barely able to summon the strength to drain his victims.

More than that, Dracula seems none too interested in even going out to dine. In the bizarre opening, Anton informs Dracula that he must move to Italy to find some virgins, but Dracula is reluctant, a party-pooper. “I cannot leave my family down in the crypt,” he begs off. Bizarre.

Even Dracula’s death scene is symptomatic of the character’s impotence. Mario chops his arms off, then his legs. The purportedly regal count is thus left flailing about with no usable limbs. He’s a weakling, not a figure of fright or authority at all. At one disgusting point, Dracula is reduced to licking a virgin’s blood up off the floor, after Dallesandro’s Mario has made love to her.

Yet, oddly enough, there is a point to this depiction of Dracula. Much of the film points to the argument that the European aristocracy is weak, debauched, and dying out. Dracula represents that aristocracy. He has crippling ties to his family (he won’t leave the tomb...) even though they are dead, and his once mighty power is weakened. He needs new, fresh blood to infuse his family line.

A stronger figure than Dracula is Mario, the farmhand. He is a Communist (with a sickle and hammer painted on his bedroom wall...), and continually makes comments about Communism and the evil of the aristocracy. Dracula may be of the “upper class,” but he is “weak,” and Mario is strong and vital by contrast. He slaps one of the family’s sisters, then forces her to perform oral sex on him. Now *that’s* raw power! Representing the angry working man, the engine of the Communist model, Mario is powerful, lustful and everything the impotent Dracula is not. He cuts away the last vestiges of the upper class in Europe when he lops off Dracula’s limbs.

The preceding paragraphs make it sound like there is actually a

point to *Andy Warhol's Dracula*. There may be. But the film is still hilariously overplayed. Dallesandro speaks with a broad New York accent that is egregiously out of place in Italy. Kier is downright funny as Dracula, probably because the dialogue is rip-roaringly hysterical. "I'm sure they're very religious ... they have a nice house," Dracula comments at one point. "The blood of these whores is killing me," he notes later, enunciating the film's most famous line. In fact, every time Dracula speaks, he says something that can be interpreted, without too much strain, as really funny.

Andy Warhol's Dracula is rated X, but not for violence, as one might expect of a horror film. Instead, this is a very sexual movie, replete with explicit couplings. Three daughters take off their shirts to reveal supple, perky breasts in an early scene. Later, Mario has sex with two daughters at once, and then the siblings proceed to have sex with one another. One sister orgasms when Dracula bites her, and then there is the oral sex, and, finally, the deflowering of a 14-year-old virgin. The women are quite beautiful, and Dallesandro is a glowering male presence who struts his way through the picture, so the movie's leaps into soft-core material are fun to watch. It is not hard to state that *Andy Warhol's Dracula* is better than just about any soft-core porn film that has aired on Cinemax (i.e. Skinemax...) in at least five years.

As a funny sexy romp with a theme about class distinctions and Communism, *Andy Warhol's Dracula* is certainly one of the odder vampire films to come out of the 1970s. The production values are slipshod, the filming and editing careless, and the performances outrageous, but this is a guilty pleasure. It's fascinating to watch because one is never sure if it is merely a bad film, or a truly inspired turkey.

Andy Warhol's Frankenstein (1974) * ½

Critical Reception

"In a muddy way, the movie attempts to instruct us about the universal insensitivity, living-deadness and the inability to be turned on by anything short of the grotesque. However, this *Frankenstein* drags

as much as it camps ... it fails as a spoof and the result is only a coy binge in degradation.”—Nora Sayre, *New York Times*, May 16, 1974, page 52.

“...a highly amusing film which never lives up to its ideas. Morrissey has a bizarre sense of how satirically to transpose a classic into the pop art subculture milieu but as a director he fails to maneuver the story’s grotesque humor successfully.”—Roy Frumkes, *Films in Review*, Volume XXV, Number 6, June-July 1974, page 375.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joe Dallesandro (Farmer); Monique Van Vooren (Catherine Frankenstein); Udo Kier (Baron Frankenstein); Arro Juering (Otto); Dalilia DiLazzaro, Srdjan Zelenovic, Nicolette Elmi, Liv Bosisio, Cristina Galoni, Carla Mancini, Marco Liofredi, Fiorella Masselli, Rosita Tarash, Imelda Marani.

CREW: *Photography:* Luigi Kuveiller. *Production Designer:* Enrico Job. *Music:* Claudi Gizzi. *Editing:* Franca Silvi, Jed Johnson. *Continuity:* Silvia Petroni. *Art Director:* Gianni Giovaghon. *Special Effects:* Carlo Rambaldi. *Producer:* Andrew Baunsberg. *Written and Directed by:* Paul Morrissey. *Production Manager:* Mara Blasetti. *Camerman:* Ubaldo Terzano. *Wardrobe:* Bernito Persico. *Make-up:* Mario DeSalvio. *First Assistant Editor:* Loretta Mattioli. *Sound Mixer:* Carlo Palmieri. *Technical Consultant for Spacevision:* Robert V. Bernier. *First Production Assistant:* Vasio Mafera. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* X. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

P.O.V.

“...violence is what people want, so we’re giving it to them. That’s the secret of my success—just give

the people what they want”²³.—Andy Warhol discusses his “horror” formula with the *New York Times*.

SYNOPSIS: Baron Frankenstein and his obsequious assistant, Otto, are in search of the perfect Serbian “nose” for their bizarre experiment in creating new life from pieces of corpses. Frankenstein’s obsession with his work irritates his sister/wife, Catherine, who feels he is not devoting enough time to her or their two children. While out on a picnic with the children, the frustrated Mrs. Frankenstein befriends a rugged, charismatic peasant farmer who she previously caught fornicating in public on at least two occasions. Curious, she invites him to the castle.

At the same time, Frankenstein is assembling two new lives: a male and a female composed entirely of corpse parts. He seeks a man’s head, specifically the head of a man who thinks only of pleasure. This is necessary, because Frankenstein wants to create a master race and to do so his two creations must mate. In search of a hedonist, Otto and Frankenstein proceed to a local bordello. Catherine’s farmer and his stoic friend, Sascha, are there. Sascha is not partaking of the women, having no interest in sex. Otto and Frankenstein are unaware of this fact, and target Sascha as their perfect victim. After he leaves the bordello, they chop off Sascha’s head, and steal it.

The next morning, the farmer awakens from a drunken stupor to find his best friend dead. This does not deter him from going to the Frankenstein castle and making love to Catherine. Afterwards, Catherine offers him the job of butler in the house.

In the laboratory, Frankenstein and Otto use electricity to reanimate their two creations. They bring these odd visitors to the dinner table, and the farmer recognizes Sascha’s head. He becomes suspicious, and wants to see Frankenstein’s lab. To this end, the children help him. Later, Frankenstein watches as Catherine and her new servant make passionate love in his bed.

But, when Frankenstein tries to get his man and woman to mate, the male is unresponsive ... just like Sascha had been in life. The farmer watches from the shadows, and swears to stop the baron’s

deranged work. As the farmer tries to free Sascha, Frankenstein confronts Catherine about her sexual dalliances. She tells him of the servant's plan to free Sascha in exchange for Sascha's sexual favors. Frankenstein and Otto capture the farmer and decide he has the right sexual instincts to be the brain of their new zombie.

Catherine instructs Sascha to make love to her, but he crushes her in his arms before the act is consummated. Feeling unappreciated, Otto decides to have sex with the resurrected female, but ends up killing her because he can't complete the act correctly. A furious Frankenstein kills Otto. Then the Sascha monster returns to the lab cradling Catherine's body. He kills his creator, Frankenstein, and then himself, leaving the farmer bound and incapable of escape. Unfortunately, the Frankenstein children decide it is time to take up their father's work...

COMMENTARY: "To know death, Otto, you have to fuck life in the gall bladder," Baron Frankenstein informs his assistant in Paul Morrissey's dreadful *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*. It's an outrageous line of dialogue in an outrageous, over-the-top film. As in *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, the real focus here is on sex, not horror. In fact, this film is an inversion of *Dracula's* nutty plot. Instead of looking for virgin blood to "drink," this time Kier is looking for a lothario who can impregnate his latest monster, and thereby create a new race of undead.

A prime pleasure of both of these Warhol films is the absurd dialogue. Kier, Dallesandro, and the rest of the cast intone some of the craziest dialogue imaginable, and these flights of fancy make for a humorous film. Kier's accent is a running joke all its own. He pronounces the word "threshold" as "*trashold*," and the latter is probably a more accurate description of the movie. At another point, Kier gazes at his wife and says straight-faced, "You a sex maniac!" Not, "you are a sex maniac," but "you *a* sex maniac." Somehow, it's better that way. Kier's foreignness adds immeasurably to the off-kilter dialogue, and any viewer will realize he's not in Kansas, or Hollywood, anymore.

The situations are utterly ridiculous too. In the bizarre opening sequence of the film, Frankenstein searches for the "perfect nasum" for his monster, while arguing with the obsequious Otto about his

unclean laboratory floor. It's a campy *Odd Couple*-cum-*Frankenstein* moment. Later, Frankenstein clips off Sascha's head with oversized hedge clippers, a bizarre choice for so precise a surgeon.

In perhaps the ultimate inanity of the film, Frankenstein makes love to a corpse. The viewer actually gets to see him do it, too. Kier hops up on the laboratory table and begins to pump the corpse. When he finishes the transaction, he politely asks Otto to help him get down. The payoff for that scene occurs when a jealous Otto attempts to perform the same sex act, but merely ends up making a gory mess out of the intercourse.

Then there's the riotous scene in which Otto and Frankenstein watch closely (a little too closely...) to see if their monster can sustain an erection. Admirers of Mary Shelley's novel will flinch at these tasteless updatings, but in at least one sense, it's a breath of fresh, bloody air. The staleness of so many other *Frankenstein* movies is certainly missing here; it's anything but stodgy. Sure the picture is amateurish and ridiculous in the extreme, but it has energy.

Unlike *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* does not appear to have a larger socio-political context. In the first film, it was the fall of the aristocracy (*Dracula*) before the hungry, sexually aggressive tide of Communism (Mario). Though this film also pits Kier and Dallesandro against each other, and again balances deviate (Kier) and normal (Dallesandro) sexual appetites, the larger background is missing. But who needs subtext in trash, anyway?

There's sex aplenty again in *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, but it is a less pleasant experience than in *Dracula* simply because there is also a leering tendency to focus on bloody, internal organs. In a film that advocates "fucking gall bladders," one can expect little else. Also, the film was originally designed to be viewed in the 3-D format, which means that all the gore pops right out at the audience. It is not a particularly pleasant experience.

What in the world is one to make of this, Andy Warhol's horror duo? They are important films because they represent a new way of looking at the old monsters, if nothing else. Frankenstein and Dracula had been done to death before the 1970s, and these new

films have a really off-kilter perspective of these silver screen legends. Hardcore horror fans may not approve of the upgrade, but at least new ideas were being tried out. *Blacula* offered an African-American take on Dracula. *Dracula AD 1972* brought the count into the 1970s. *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* mixed vampire lore with kung fu. And so on. The *Andy Warhol* horror couple is just another “new” take on these ghouls, and in keeping with the “new freedom” of the 1970s, the focus is on sex as much as horror.

Also, one must remember the sensitivities of Warhol the artist. In keeping with his work, these films are as much post-modern satires as they are literal narratives. That said, they aren’t particularly well made or acted. But they’re damn memorable.

The Beast Must Die

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Dr. Lundgren); Marlene Clark (Caroline Newcliffe); Anton Diffring (Pavel); Charles Gray (Bennington).

CREW: *Directed by:* Paul Annett. *Written by:* James Blish and Michael Winder. *Produced by:* Milton Subotsky and Max Rosenberg. *Director of Photography:* Jack Hildyard. *Editor:* Peter Tanner. *Music:* Douglas Gamley. Amicus Pictures. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: This Amicus horror film took no chances. It was originally known as *Black Werewolf* so as to tie in with *Blackenstein*, *Blacula*, *Abby* and other “black” horror films of the day. And, it featured the strange stylistic conceit of a voice-over narrator who asked audiences to “guess” the identity of the killer (monster). Other than that, the film digested, in equal parts, *The Most Dangerous Game*, *The Wolf Man*, and *Ten Little Indians*. Peter Cushing again headlines, this time as a man hunting werewolves. Hugely entertaining in a cheesy way.

Critical Reception

“This moody depiction of the Christmas slayings ... is as murky as the script, which dotes largely on obscenities that are no more pointed than the violence, dull direction and pedestrian performances.”—A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, October 20, 1975, page 45.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Olivia Hussey (Jess Bradford); Keir Dullea (Peter Smythe); Margot Kidder (Barbara); Marian Waldman (Mrs. Mack); Andrea Martin (Phyl); James Edmond (Mr. Harrison); Douglas McGrath (Sergeant Nash); Art Hindle (Chris); Lynne Griffin (Clare Harrison); Michael Rapport (Patrick); John Saxon (Lt. Fuller); Les Carlson (Graham); Martha Gibson (Mrs. Quilfy); John Ratter (Laughing Detective); Robert Warner (Doctor); Syd Brown (Farmer); Jack Van Evera and Les Rubie (Search Party); Pam Barney (Jean); Marcia Diamond (Woman); Robert Hawkins (Wes); Dave Clement (Cogan); Julian Reed (Jennings); John Stoneham, Danny Gain and Tom Foreman (Cops).

CREW: Warner Brothers Presents a Film Funding Production, *Black Christmas*. *Music:* Chris Zittler. *Director of Photography:* Reg Morris. *Screenplay:* Roy Moore. *Executive Producer:* Findlay Quinn. *Co-Producer:* Gerry Arbeid. *Produced and Directed by:* Bob Clark. *Associate Producer:* Richard Schouten. *Production Supervisor:* Dave Robertson. *Editor:* Stan Cole. *Sound Editor:* Ken Helley-Ray. *Art Director:* Karen Bromley. *Script Supervisor:* Sandra Ulosevich. *Assistant Producer:* Gary Goch. *Production Comptroller:* Barry Leyland. *First Assistant Director:* Tony Thatcher. *Second Assistant Director:* John Eckert. *Third Assistant Director:* Don Brough. *Production Assistant:* Melody Greene. *Camera*

Operator: Bert Dunk. *Wardrobe:* Debi Weldon.
Hairdresser: David Beecroft. *Make-up:* Bill Morgan.
Color by: Quinn Labs. *Filmed in:* Panavision.
Distributed by: Warner Brothers. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R.
Running Time: 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: At Christmas time in the town of Bedford, the sorority house of Pi Kappa Sigma at Six Belmont Place is terrorized by an obscene phone caller called the “Moaner.” On this particular night, however, the phone stalker has gotten far more ambitious: he has scaled a wall, and found entrance to the house through an open window in the attic.

Unaware that a lunatic has entered their home, the girls of the sorority go about holiday business. Barbara is a heavy-drinking, sharp-tongued cynic whose abrasive personality hides the fact she has an empty family life. Beautiful Jess Bradford is dating a struggling, temperamental pianist named Peter, and has just learned that she is carrying his child. Phyl is the house “geek,” and Clare Harrison is what Barbara describes as a “professional virgin.” Running roughshod over this group of co-eds is Mrs. Mack, the alcoholic housemother who maintains her own suite in the house (including its own phone line).

Before long, the “Moaner” strikes. He lures Clare to her death by imitating the meows of the house cat, Claude. He strangles the poor girl with a plastic covering. After hiding the corpse in the attic, the Moaner calls the house phone, and Jess is terrified to hear many deranged voices, including those belonging to people named Agnes and Billy, shouting at her.

The next day, Clare’s father arrives on campus and learns that his daughter is missing. Mr. Harrison goes to the police, who dismiss his story. When a thirteen-year-old girl is found dead in a nearby park, however, Lt. Fuller and the police realize there is real trouble and begin a search for Clare. Jess also warns Lt. Fuller that the sorority house has been receiving odd calls. Fuller determines to trace them and instructs Jess to stay on the line the next time the “Moaner” plays his game. Meanwhile, as the girls search for Clare, Mrs. Mack is murdered in the attic.

The night is filled with terror when the “Moaner” rings the sorority again, this time echoing in precise detail the words that Peter used during an argument with Jess about having an abortion. Jess comes to fear that her own boyfriend is the deranged killer, but she refuses to share her suspicions with Lt. Fuller. Unknown to Jess, the killer is already in the house again. This time, he kills Barbara as she sleeps, stabbing her repeatedly with a glass unicorn.

The next time the “Moaner” calls, the police trace is successful. Sergeant Nash informs Jess that the killer is calling from inside the house, from Mrs. Mack’s separate line upstairs. Though ordered to get out of the house, Jess is curious to learn what has happened to her missing friend Phyl. Jess finds the answer in an upstairs bedroom: Phyl’s corpse lies sprawled next to Barbara’s. The Moaner strikes, pursuing Jess to the basement.

Jess locks herself in the basement, and is surprised when Peter breaks a window to gain entrance. Convinced he is the killer, Jess bludgeons Peter to death. The police arrive at the sorority house, and Lt. Fuller has come to the same conclusion: that Peter was the killer. Poor, traumatized Jess is sedated and left to sleep peacefully in her home until her folks arrive in a few hours.

Then, the phone rings again....

COMMENTARY: All the mechanisms of popular ’70s slasher films appear in 1974’s *Black Christmas*. That’s rather shocking in and of itself since *Halloween* (1978) is often legitimately considered the beginning of the stalker/slasher ’70s trend. Yet *Black Christmas* is centered around a holiday (you can guess which one...), it features a maniacal killer, it pits that killer against a group of attractive young people in an isolated setting, and in the end, the killer is not actually stopped, but kept alive ... for a sequel?

Additionally, the most convenient of 1970s conveniences, the telephone, plays a dramatic and important role in the “stalkings” of *Black Christmas*. This is a role that it would repeat in more well known examples of the genre such as *When a Stranger Calls* (1979) and *Scream* (1996). Even the P.O.V. first-person subjective “stalking” shots popularized by the flashy preamble of *Halloween* are in evidence in *Black Christmas* during critical moments. So,

perhaps the movie deserves some credit for pointing audiences in the direction the genre would soon take. After *Halloween*, for instance, the floodgates of “stalker” films opened with everything from *Friday the 13th* to *He Knows You’re Alone*, to *Mother’s Day*, to *My Bloody Valentine*, to *April Fool’s Day*. *Black Christmas* is a pioneer of the format of that particular sub-genre.

But if one looks beyond the tools the film employs, *Black Christmas* is only so-so. There are many effective horror/attack sequences, some of them quite suspenseful, but the film ultimately reveals many of the same flaws as its less-than-satisfactory 1980s brethren. Remember, for instance, how the terror unfolded believably and quickly in *Halloween*, and how the Laurie Strode character responded to each of Michael’s challenges in intelligent fashion. She was a believable human being, and when she was stalked, she responded in recognizable and ingenious human fashion.

Black Christmas does not afford its own *dramatis personae* that luxury. For instance, nobody in the whole film is interested in searching the attic. Not the girls and not the cops. Sure, the old housemother goes up there and is promptly murdered, but she has conveniently told everyone she is “going away” before this sojourn upstairs. Of course, nobody bothers to look for her body up there, and everyone just assumes she’s already left town. How convenient, and how clichéd. One might think that if a killer had gained entrance into a house once, authorities would conduct a top to bottom search.

There’s also a problem with the last portion of the film, the portion that sets up Peter as the (false) culprit. Misdirection is one thing, but it strains believability that Jess (Hussey) would kill her boyfriend without at least some kind of pretty solid confirmation that he is, in fact, the killer. Worse, after she murders Peter, the police sedate Jess and then leave her alone in the house! *At a crime scene!!!*

Again, the behavior doesn’t ring true. When the phone blares again, revealing that the killer is still at large, the audience thus feels cheated. It wants to get to the same point of horror the movie does, but it wants that to happen in a believable, honest fashion. It is not likely the police would fail to search the sorority house, or that Jess

would murder her boyfriend without knowing he was the murderer. It is even less likely that the police would leave a sedated college student alone at the scene of a bloody crime for the night. Horror fans are generally a very forgiving lot, and they look for gems where they can, but a movie that relies on plot holes and poor motivations tries their patience.

Despite the problems that make suspension of disbelief difficult for *Black Christmas*, the film is quite successful in other ways. For instance, the “Moaner” is a really creepy villain. His sick, oddball voice is frightening, and the things he says are downright horrid. “You pig, you bitch, you pig ... let me lick your #&\$#*t,” he says to one girl. That’s pretty rough stuff, and pretty frightening too. The scenario works because we’ve all been plagued by crank callers, and some of us have even been plagued by crank callers while alone in our homes. That’s a terrifying experience to have, and *Black Christmas* exploits it pretty well, though not nearly as powerfully as *When a Stranger Calls*.

The cast, consisting of Keir Dullea, Margot Kidder, and Olivia Hussey is also much stronger than this material requires. These are great performers, and one wonders why they are playing “victims” in a low-budget slasher picture of the “dead teenager” variety. Horror films are respectable all right, but some are more so than others. Usually, it is hungry unknowns (like Kevin Bacon in *Friday the 13th* or Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween*) who star in movies of this type, and then find mass acceptance because of well-conceived performances. It’s a little disturbing to see established actors playing the common horror stereotypes: the virgin, the townie, the angry boyfriend, the alcoholic, et cetera. They deserve a better script. It could still be one in the horror genre, but it should be better than the one that was shot here.

Black Christmas is pretty good at what it does most of the time. The body of the film is fit, and many suspense and attack scenes are well orchestrated, but the picture’s brain seems only half-engaged. And the ending is a huge cheat, no two ways about it. There are so many rotten slasher movies out there, and this was somewhere in the upper middle class of that mostly undistinguished pack. It’s no *Halloween*. It’s no *Friday the 13th* either. It’s good for a few jolts, a

few shivers, and a peek into the future of the stalker film, but little else.

The Cars That Ate Paris

Cast & Crew

CAST: John Meillon (Mayor); Bruce Spence (Charlie); Kevin Miles (Midland); Rick Scully (George); Terry Canpilleri (Arthur); Danny Adcock (Policeman).

CREW: *Directed by:* Peter Weir. *Written by:* Peter Weir, Keith Gow, and Piers Davies. *Produced by:* Hal McElroy. *Director of Photography:* John McLean. *Film Editor:* Wayne LeClos. *Music:* Bruce Smeaton. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

DETAILS: Before *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Peter Weir directed this intense story of an isolated Australian town that resorts to ambush and other atrocities to stay alive. The town youngsters drive souped-up, bizarre vehicles (from cannibalized cars), forecasting the *Mad Max* series. Tourists, beware!

The Dead Don't Die (1974) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: George Hamilton (Don Drake); Linda Cristal (Vera Lavelle); Joan Blondell (Mrs. Perditto); Ralph Meeker (Lt. Reardon); James McEachin (Specht); Reggie Nalder (Mr. Perditto); Ray Milland (Moss); Jerry Douglas (Ralph Drake); Milton Parsons (Funeral Home Receptionist); William O'Connell (Priest); Yvette Vickers (Miss Adrian); Brendon Dillon (Prison Chaplain); Russ Grieres (Prison Guard); Bill Smillie (Newspaperman).

CREW: *Director of Photography:* James Crabe. *Produced by:* Henry Colman. *Written by:* Robert

Bloch. *Directed by:* Curtis Harrington. *Executive Producers:* Douglas S. Cramer, W.L. Baumes. *Music by:* Robert Prince. *Executive Production Manager:* Hal Polaire. *Film Editor:* Ronald J. Fagan. *Art Director:* Robert Kinoshita. *Casting:* Otto and Windsor Casting, Ltd. *Assistant Director:* Richard Moder. *Sound Engineer:* William Tremellen. *Music Editor:* Ken Hall. *Sound Editor:* Don Hall. *Property Master:* Gene Booth. *Set Decorator:* John Franco, Jr. *Costumes:* Oscar Rodriguez, Betsy Cox. *Executive Assistant:* Diana Arieto. *Title Design:* Phill Norman. *Special Effects:* A & A Special Effects. Filmed at 20th Century-Fox *M.P.A.A Rating:* Made for TV. *Running Time:* 75 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On death row in 1934, a prisoner faces execution in the electric chair for the murder of his wife. He tells his brother, a lawyer named Don Drake, that he is innocent. He begs Don to find the real murderer. The execution is carried out, and then the interment follows at Maywood Cemetery. A woman in black attends the graveside service.

Determined to know the truth about his brother, Don pays a visit to Mr. Moss, the owner of the dance club where his brother's wife, Frances, was found dead. Don is unaware he is being followed by the lady in black. After the meeting with Moss, she introduces herself to him as Vera, and tells him to leave Chicago immediately for his own safety. Not long thereafter, Don is shocked to see his own brother, Ralph, staring at him from outside a window. Don goes to look for him, but he has vanished inside an antique store. Don fights with the owner, Perditto, who he thinks is hiding Ralph, and is knocked unconscious.

Don awakens the next afternoon, his wounds tended by Vera. She warns him that a dangerous man named Varek is responsible for the horrors he has witnessed. When Don demands that she take him to Varek, Vera leads him to a funeral home instead. There, they find the antique dealer, Perditto, dead. The corpse awakens and speaks to Don, informing him that the living dead are his children and that he, Varek, can manipulate bodies. The corpse rises from the coffin

and pursues Don. He flees the building and reports the situation to the police. They investigate, and find nothing to corroborate his story. At the antique store, Perditto appears very much alive.

Don goes back to see Moss at the dance hall, and tells him what happened. Moss puts Drake up in his apartment while he looks into the crazy tale. At the cemetery that night, Don sees his brother, alive again. The lady in Black, Vera, then pays him a visit, warning that Varek has sent her to kill him. Oddly, she reveals that she belongs to Varek because she is already dead. In fact, Varek has revived her as a zombie to serve him. Varek is apparently a lord of the zombies, a sorcerer. He framed Vera in life for a crime she didn't commit, just like what happened to Ralph, and in death she is Varek's slave.

It is soon revealed that Varek controls Vera with a voodoo doll. If the doll is destroyed, then Vera will also die. In payment for her betrayal, Varek burns Vera's voodoo doll and kills her. A shattered Don then drives to Maywood cemetery with Moss to see if Ralph remains in his grave, or has risen as a zombie. An empty casket reveals that Vera's wild story was true. Drake is then attacked by zombies, but assisted by a black man, Specht, who warns him that Moss is actually Varek, the nefarious zombie master.

Specht and Don flee to Albert Storage to gather evidence of Varek's evil. Varek dispatches his zombies after them, and they kill Specht. Don is left on his own in the warehouse, where he finds more zombies in cold storage. One of them is Frances, Ralph's wife.

Varek arrives at the warehouse and reveals his plan. He will raise his zombie children and attempt world domination. His undead ghouls will man critical posts, and make him the most powerful man on Earth. After explaining this plan, Varek sends Ralph to kill Don, his own brother.

Don attempts to reason with his zombified brother, informing Ralph that Frances, Ralph's beloved wife, was also killed by Varek. Ralph turns on his master, and impales Varek on a meat hook. As Varek expires, so do his zombie servants.

When Don returns to the scene with police, Varek and the zombies

have disappeared...

COMMENTARY: By rights, *The Dead Don't Die* shouldn't be included in this text, since it is devoted to theatrical horror features of the 1970s. Yet the rules were broken for *Duel*, a Steven Spielberg-directed TV movie that was released theatrically in Europe. And, the rules are bent slightly again to include *The Dead Don't Die*, another unique television movie.

The film is interesting and worthy of note for a number of reasons. In addition to a great horror pedigree (writer Robert Bloch and director Curtis Harrington), and an impressive B-movie cast (including Reggie Nalder, Ray Milland, and George Hamilton), *The Dead Don't Die* features a return to the old, pre-*Night of the Living Dead* conception of zombies. This is in direct contrast to most such films of the '70s, which adopted Romero's template of the undead for their productions (as seen in *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* [1972], *Tombs of the Blind Dead* [1972], *Zombie* [1979], and others). So historically, *The Dead Don't Die* bucks a worldwide trend in zombie movies, and deserves some note for that. It was not until *The Serpent and the Rainbow* in 1987, that the original concept of zombies (as undead slaves of the living) was again featured prominently in film.

As Wade Davis's book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* defined it, a zombie (or zombi) was, as seen by the people of Haiti, is the "spirit of a dead man." Much of that book concerns how a strange native mix of chemicals caused people in Haiti to appear to die suddenly, and then rise as slaves without will. In the book, Davis encounters strange secret societies that utilize the zombie powder as a kind of punishment for those who have broken unspoken laws. When sold out by enemies or competitors, these so-called criminals are turned into zombies. Simply put, zombification (care of the chemical tetrodotoxin) was a method to control people.

This depiction of the zombie as mindless followers of a cabal or corrupt individual actually survived into early Hollywood. *White Zombie* (1932) starred Bela Lugosi as a zombie master in the West Indies who develops an army of the creatures. But in the late '60s the ghouls of *Night of the Living Dead* also became known as zombies. These critters were feral creatures not held under the

authority or sway of any particular person or group. *The Dead Don't Die* reconsiders the zombies of Haiti and *White Zombie* by featuring, again, the story of a zombie master, this time Ray Milland.

What makes the film rather interesting is that it is all told within the venue of the 1930–40s detective film, or *film noir*. Don Drake is the intrepid sleuth, personally involved in a case. Vera Lavelle is the mysterious woman with a dark secret who also serves as a romantic distraction for Drake. And Moss/Varek is the evil man with the terrible plan. These are all “stock” detective genre characters, and even Nalder’s character is familiar: the boss’s nasty henchman.

Considering the subject matter, the film is told much as it might have been in Hollywood’s golden age. For instance, the stars of *The Dead Don't Die* appear in an “iris” with their names emblazoned underneath, in tried-and-true black-and-white movie fashion. That there is a central mystery to be solved also reflects the “private dick” films of that bygone era. Considering that later Hollywood productions such as *Angel Heart* (1987) and *Lord of Illusions* (1995) also tried to marry the detective *film noir* genre with out-and-out horror, *The Dead Don't Die* is historically valuable, a predecessor to what Hollywood imagined in later decades.

As a genre-blending, nostalgia-provoking film, *The Dead Don't Die* is really pretty good. It goes against the grain of history (by remembering the early definition of a “zombie”), and is directed with a simple hand that reflects the era it depicts. Where the film falters is in two areas. Don Drake (as portrayed by Hamilton) is not the best protagonist. He is led around on a leash (first by Vera, then by Moss), and does not register much surprise that someone can raise the dead and control them.

Likewise, Ray Milland plays the talking villain, a cliché defined by Roger Ebert. The talking villain appears in the James Bond films all the time, and occasionally in horror (as in 1970’s *Scream and Scream Again*). Here, Milland thoughtfully explains his plan for world domination to the hero. He would have been better off just to keep his mouth shut, but some villains just never learn.

Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Baron Frankenstein); David Prowse (the Monster); Patrick Troughton (Body Snatcher); Shane Briant (Simon); Madeline Smith (Sarah).

CREW: *Directed by:* Terence Fisher. *Written by:* Anthony Hinds. *Produced by:* Roy Skeggs. *Director of Photography:* Brian Probyn. *Editor:* James Needs. *Music:* James Bernard. Hammer Studios. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: Hammer's final Frankenstein film is weak business set at an insane asylum. This time, the mad doctor, Cushing again, is joined by a young and equally insane apprentice, Shane Briant. Together, they create a new monster, but get the same results as before...

The Ghoul (1974) * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Dr. Lawrence); John Hurt (Tom Rawling); Alexandra Bastedo (Angela); Gwen Watford (Ayush); Veronica Carlson (Daphne); Stewart Bevan (Billy); Ian McCulloch (Geoffrey); John D. Collins (Young Man); Dan Meaden (Policeman); Don Henderson (the Ghoul).

CREW: A Tyburn Film Production. *Director of Photography:* John Wilcox. *Art Director:* Jack Shampian. *Assistant Art Director:* Peter Williams. *Costumes Designed by:* Anthony Mendelson. *Costumes Executed by:* Behrens and Nathans of London. *Film Editor:* Henry Richardson. *Sound Editor:* Roy Baker. *Production Manager:* Ron Jackson. *Make-up Created by:* Roy Ashton. *Assistant Director:* Peter Saunders. *Continuity:* Pamela Davies. *Music Composed by:* Harry Robinson. *Music Supervision:* Philip Martell. *Recorded at:* Anvil Studios. *Screenplay by:* John Elder. *Produced by:* Kevin Francis. *Directed by:* Freddie Francis. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Ghoul: a person of revolting, inhuman tastes ... supposed in the East to haunt burial places and feed on the dead.”—the opening card of *The Ghoul* (1974) defines its titular character.

SYNOPSIS: In London of the Roaring '20s, a bunch of rich folks play cruel, debauched jokes on one another at a party. Wealthy youngsters Daphne and Billy decide to race Angela and Geoffrey in their new motorcar, making for “land’s end,” the Atlantic coast.

The race becomes a competitive contest, but Daphne and Billy are

unexpectedly sidelined when their car runs out of gas. After parking on the edge of a precipice overlooking the moors, Billy goes off in search of petrol. While he's away, an odd stranger named Tom Rawlings abducts Daphne. He warns her not to go near his master's house, but she escapes, and is invited inside the estate by the polite Mr. Lawrence, the owner.

Mr. Lawrence is former clergy, and he obligingly prepares a room for Daphne. In short order, Daphne meets the Indian housekeeper and learns that the lady of the house is deceased. Apparently, Mr. Lawrence used to live in India, and his late wife and his only son were corrupted by a holy man there ... someone that Lawrence describes only as "depraved." While Daphne naps, Mr. Lawrence sends his gardener, Tom, off to find Billy. Tom pushes Billy and his car off the cliff, killing him. He reports back that Billy has left and returned home.

Daphne starts to experience the odd feeling that Lawrence is keeping her in the house for some dark purpose. That night, a deformed stranger sneaks into Daphne's bedroom and brutally murders her with an Indian stabbing implement.

Elsewhere, Angela and Geoffrey identify Billy's body for the authorities and set about looking for the missing Daphne. They follow her trail to the moors, and Angela is abducted by Tom. While searching for Daphne and now Angela, Geoffrey arrives at the Lawrence estate and invites himself in. He meets Mr. Lawrence, who lies to him by claiming that Daphne took a bus back to London. He even tries to convince Geoffrey that Angela did likewise.

Geoffrey is not convinced, and questions Tom about the accuracy of these stories. Tom flees rather than answer, and Geoffrey chases him into an area of quicksand. Tom gets caught in the quicksand but Geoffrey offers to save him if he will tell him what really happened. Rather than sink in the quicksand, Tom reveals the truth. He also claims that there is an inhuman monster living in the Lawrence house—a monster that feeds on human beings.

Geoffrey returns to question Lawrence, and is promptly killed by the depraved thing living upstairs. This strange ghoul, Lawrence's

son, plants a knife in Geoffrey's head.

At the same time, Tom attempts to rape Angela. She tries to escape, but is confronted by the ghoul. The ghoul kills Tom, but before it can murder Angela, Dr. Lawrence kills the filthy beast, his own son. As Angela flees the grounds, Lawrence puts a bullet in his own head, and ends the nightmare permanently.

COMMENTARY: *The Ghoul* is a tedious, slow-paced, “veddy British” thriller about a family “secret.” It plays like an exploitation version of *Jane Eyre* or *Rebecca*, and suffers from inconsistent characters and motivations. The anti-climactic ending only serves to heighten the boredom factor.

The picture opens with a very stylized preamble. The beautiful Daphne walks a long, dark hallway with candle in hand. Everything is filmed from a cockeyed angle, and there is a sense of expressionist film at work. A creepy voice calls out to her, and Daphne opens a closed door. Behind it, a drooling corpse is hanging in the middle of the room, swaying slowly...

It's a creepy, effective way to start a horror movie, and it yet has absolutely nothing to do with anything else in the film. The whole sequence is but a joke played by the decadent rich, a joke designed to see if Daphne will scream bloody murder when confronted by evil. It is very stylish, and very purposeless.

From that cryptic, if nicely Gothic, opening, the movie spends the next ten or so minutes embroiled in a car chase that establishes a few things about Daphne, ostensibly the film's lead character. She is haughty, pushy, forthright, and strong-willed. She didn't scream when faced with that corpse, and during the chase she even assumes control of the car's wheel. She is the “spoiled rich,” and a very assertive personality. In fact, the film establishes Daphne's nature well. The audience gets to know her, and doesn't necessarily like her, but she's a tough cookie and kind of admirable in her toughness.

Yet, from the point Daphne is held captive by Tom, her character undergoes an about face. This aggressive, hell-on-wheels rich kid becomes, at the snap of the screenwriter's fingers, a shrinking

violet. Suddenly she's a weak-willed prisoner who accepts the unlikely assurances of strangers on a variety of issues. This is a big-time switcheroo, and wholly inconsistent with everything that has already been depicted. Before long, Daphne dies as a result of her inaction, in a reiteration of the famous Janet Leigh trick, but her character has already been terribly compromised.

From Daphne's death forward, the film is lugubriously paced, as John Hurt plays "psycho" and threatens the heroine-in-waiting, Angela. All the while, Cushing's Lawrence maintains his "haunting" secret upstairs. But even his character is inconsistent. He goes on record confirming that he hates the man who turned his son into a depraved maniac, yet he keeps the services of an Indian housekeeper who shares similar beliefs. Also, Lawrence, a former priest, imprisons Daphne so that his son might continue to live by those beliefs, and feed on her.

Finally, Lawrence changes his mind, and kills his son outright, claiming he should have done it years earlier. So is he a deceptive man? A willing accomplice to his son's evil? Why does he choose this moment (after years of helping his son...) to murder the ghoul? Why not kill him before Daphne died. Or before Geoffrey died? Or before Tom died? Clearly, Lawrence's decision to stop his depraved son is timed solely to provide the film a reasonable climax, not for any legitimate dramatic or character motivation.

The final revelation that Lawrence Jr. is something of a scarred monster is undercut by his appearance. He is a bald man wearing a bright yellow gown, and is not exactly fear inspiring. His make-up is bad too: his face is purple, while the rest of his complexion is pale white. The revelation of this inhuman "look" is not nearly enough of a jolt after all the build-up. But then again, nor is the insufficient ending that finds Cushing committing suicide, as Angela runs away, traumatized, but otherwise unharmed.

For long stretches of time in *The Ghoul*, nothing really happens. People talk, a secret is alluded to, and Hurt threatens to rape women, but never follows through. One might make the claim that the film is aiming for a steady, Gothic feel, with its familial secrets, its characterization of evil, and its (various) damsels in distress. But there's just not enough happening to keep the thin material afloat.

It doesn't hang together.

House of Whipcord

Cast & Crew

CAST: Barbara Markham (Mrs. Wakehurst); Patrick Barr (Justice Bailey); Ray Brooks (Tony); Sheila Keith (Walker); Ivor Salter (Jack).

CREW: *Written, Produced and Directed by:* Peter Walker. *Music:* Stanley Myers. *Editor:* Matt McCarthy. *Director of Photography:* Peter Jessop. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 102 minutes.

DETAILS: Break out the whips! This is a tale of sadism, cruelty and revenge as “judge” Patrick Barr and a female colleague torture, brutalize, and whip women in the name of the law. Debauched.

It Lives by Night

Cast & Crew

CAST: Paul Carr (Dr. Kipley); Stewart Moss, Marianne McAndrew, Michael Pataki, Arthur Space, Robert Berk, Pat Delaney.

CREW: *Directed by:* Jerry Jameson. *Written and Produced by:* Lou Shaw. *Executive Producers:* Nicolas Jenna, Matthew Leonetti. *Special Effects by:* Howard Anderson Company. *Director of Photography:* Matthew Leonetti. *Film Editor:* Tom Stevens. *Music:* Artie Kane. *M.P.A.A Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approximate).

DETAILS: A bat expert (Moss) and his attention-starved wife (McAndrew), visit a cavern while on vacation, and hubbie is swiped by a disease-infected rat. Very soon, he is transforming into a rabid bat monster, despite the best efforts of Dr. Kipley (Carr).

The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires (1974) * * * 1/2

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Van Helsing); David Chiang (Hsi Ching); Julie Ege (Vanessa Buren); Robin Stewart (Leyland Van Helsing); John Forbes-Robinson (Count Dracula); Shi Szu (Mai Kwai); Robert Hanna (British Consul); Chan Shen (Kah); James Ma (Hsi Ta); Liu Chia Yung (Hsi Kwei); Peng Ko An (Hai Sing); Chen Teh Loong (Hsi San); Wong Han Chan (Leung Hon).

CREW: *Director of Photography:* John Williams.
Editor: Chris Barns. *Assistant Editor:* Larry Richardson. *Special Effects:* Les Bowie. *Martial Arts Sequences:* Kan Chia. *Assistant to Producers:* Christopher Garrison. *Screenplay:* Don Houghton. *Produced by:* Don Houghton, Vee-King Shaw. *Music by:* James Bernard. *Music Supervisor:* Philip Martell. *Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker. A Hammer-Shaw Production made entirely in Hong Kong. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* Unrated. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Transylvania in the year 1804, Kah, the high priest (in Szechuan) of the golden vampires, resurrects the Prince of Darkness, seeking to restore his power base in China. Instead, Dracula steals Kah's "mortal coil," and inhabits his body.

One hundred years later, Professor Van Helsing is visiting the province of Chung King as an expert on the occult and vampirism. His lectures are met with skepticism by the Chinese locals, but for one man, Hsi Ching. In one symposium, Van Helsing recounts the legend of a farmer who fought the seven golden vampires to free his daughter of their demonic grip. The farmer killed one of the undead before being killed himself, but six are believed to survive.

To Hsi Ching, this is no legend or fairy tale: the story is about his village. To this day, the golden vampires, led by Dracula, steal the women of his community, and terrorize the inhabitants by night.

Van Helsing agrees to help Hsi Ching and his family—a band of agile warriors—defeat the vampires. Joining them on the long trek to the village is Van Helsing's son, Leyland, and a wealthy widower, Vanessa Buren. As they leave Chung King, Van Helsing's vampire-slaying squad is confronted by a local warlord's army, in revenge for a perceived slight from Leyland. Hsi Ching and his brothers (and sister!) defeat them easily in combat, and the trek continues. En route to the subjugated village, Van Helsing briefs his seven Chinese defenders in the ways of the vampire.

The vampires attack the approaching group by night, as they sleep in a cave. There is vicious, close-quarter combat, but Van Helsing's men are triumphant. Three vampires are killed in combat, leaving only three remaining ... plus the powerful leader, Dracula. Van Helsing and Hsi Ching make preparations for the final battle with evil at the Chinese castle of Dracula.

In the ensuing fight, Vanessa is bitten ... and transformed into a vampire. Hsi Ching, who has developed romantic feelings for her, is forced to kill her. When he is bitten as well, the courageous Hsi Ching commits suicide rather than become a servant of evil. Then Ching's sister is captured, and Leyland pursues her to the castle, and the ceremonial chamber where her blood is to be spilled.

Professor Van Helsing arrives in the nick of time, killing the last golden vampire and facing down Dracula ... who reveals his true face to the long-time nemesis. Van Helsing ends the affair with a stake aimed right at Dracula's heart.

COMMENTARY: All the vitality and energy that was missing from 1973's *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* has been infused into the *Legend of Seven Golden Vampires*, a kung-fu/vampire film with an excess of style, action and fun. Though Christopher Lee is missing from the film, Peter Cushing leads a talented cast in what amounts to a 90-minute celebration of acrobatic movement and exquisite violence. While also cashing in on the 1970s fascination with kung fu movies and Bruce Lee, *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* harks back to Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*. As in that classic film (later remade as *The Magnificent Seven*), a town is at risk, and a group of brave warriors must save it from exploitation. Only in this case, the warriors are lead by Van Helsing, and the bad guys are commanded

by the Prince of Darkness.

Although it is a little sad to note that the Dracula franchise is now following film trends rather than inspiring them, the fun aspects of *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* outweigh the fact that the film is, essentially, an exploitation piece. The film is filled with the exaggerated chop-socky sound effects one has come to associate with Asian action cinema, and there is a lot of female nudity in the film too. Clearly, Hammer wasn't hedging any bets after the failure of *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*.



East meets west, and Kah (Chan Shen) meets Dracula (John Forbes-Robinson) in *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* (1974).

But, holding it all together (in a much more significant part than he had in the previous *Dracula* film) is that old friend Peter Cushing. He has a wonderful scene in this film in which he explains to his companions a simple feeling he is experiencing. He senses that something terrible, the lair of the vampire, may be around the next corner, and he is disturbed. As Cushing puts this feeling to words, he rivets the audience's attention with his voice and his inflection.

He perfectly embodies the “veteran” who has faced evil before, and his “gut instincts” become the subject of the moment. It’s a nice character moment, especially considering that Van Helsing was never as well developed as Cushing’s Frankenstein. This film does much to rectify that wrong, making Van Helsing first a pariah for his beliefs and then a staunch advocate of Hsi Ching. Cushing has never been better.

Beyond Cushing’s performance, the action scenes are pretty amazing. Every excuse imaginable is used to stage a fight, and these incredible dances of death are brilliantly orchestrated. In a few instances they appear a bit over-choreographed, but for the most part, they are rousing, and dynamic examples of kinetic movement and confrontation.

With spikier confrontations, a re-modeling of vampire conventions (with the Lord Buddha stepping in for the Christian crucifix), and compelling lead characters, not to mention fantastic battle sequences, *The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* is one of the most enjoyable Hammer franchise films in some time. The film suffered from a limited release in the United States, and that’s a shame, because its genre-blending nature was prophetic as well as successful. Both *The Matrix* (1999) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) dared to blend science fiction and fantasy with the martial arts, in much the same fascinating manner that *Golden Vampires* blends horror with the action. If re-released, or re-made today, this movie would be huge. It is a forerunner of the kind of action pieces now raking in hundreds of millions of dollars.

If there’s any problem with the film at all, it is that the final battle seems easy. If the seven brothers can kill off the vampires so easily, why do they need Van Helsing to come along for the ride? Secondly, the final climax, Van Helsing vs. Dracula, is underwhelming after all the kung-fu gymnastics. Of course, it would be hard to create a memorable or spectacular death for Dracula at this point in film history. He’s been spiked, showered, electrocuted, iced, impaled and chased through a thorny thicket. His death in *Golden Vampires* is traditional: he gets run through the heart with a wooden spike. As Buffy might say, no muss, no fuss.

It’s a shame this was the last film in Hammer’s *Dracula* cycle,

because it has ten times as much life as its predecessor, and is filled with enough action and fun for six horror films.

Seizure (1974) * * ½

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jonathan Frid (Edmund Blackstone); Martine Beswick (the Queen); Joe Sirola (Charlie); Christina Pickles (Nicole); Anne Meacham (Eunice); Roger De Koven (Serge); Troy Donahue (Mark); Mary Woronov (Mikki); Richard Cox (Gerald); Timothy Oasey (Jason); Henry Backer (Jackal); Lucy Bingham (Betsy); Herve Villechaize (the Spider); Alexis Kirk (Arris); Emil Meola (Gas Station Attendant); Timothy Rowse (Milkman); Aziz (Himself).

CREW: Cinerama Releasing and Euro-American Pictures Present *Seizure*. *Production Supervisor:* Jeffrey D. Kapelman. *First Assistant Director:* Timothy Rowse. *Second Assistant Director:* Emil Meola. *Camera Operator:* Daniel Arzouni. *First Assistant Camera:* Guy Bernadese. *Second Assistant Camera:* Johnny Bedroussian. *Grip:* Michel Lauzier. *Stills:* Herve Villechaize. *Electrician:* Jacques Rousseau. *Assistant Electrician:* Rejean Laramée. *Sound Recordist:* Martin Joyal. *Assistant Sound:* Larry Miller. *Sound Mixer:* Joe Grimaldi. *Sound Effects:* Ken Heeley-Ray. *Re-Recording:* Rejean Gigier. *Sound Editor:* Nobuko Oganessoff. *Assistant Editor:* Jacqueline Boucher. *Continuity:* Lise Venne. *Property Man:* James McCelmontt. *Property Mistress:* Michelle Marchand. *Make-up Supervisor/Special Effects:* Thomas Brumberger. *Wardrobe/Hair:* Linda Coleman. *Carpenter:* Gerard Legault. *Production Secretary:* Rigdon Reese. *Production Assistants:* Richard Morris, Lucy Bingham. *Edmund's Sketches:* Edward Mann. *Batick Paintings:* Judith Aranyi. *Director of Photography:* Roger Racine. *Art Director:*

Najwa Stone. *Wardrobe and Jewelry Design*: Alexis Kirk. *Film Editors*: Nobuko Oganessoff, Oliver Stone. *Music*: Lee Gagnon. *Music Produced by*: Theme Variations (Montreal). *Executive Producers*: Harold Greenberg, Donald Johnston. *Original Screenplay*: Edward Mann, Oliver Stone. *Produced by*: Garrad L. Glenn, Jeffrey P. Kapelman. *Directed by*: Oliver Stone. Made on location at Val Morin Province of Quebec, Canada. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 90 minutes (approx).

SYNOPSIS: A frustrated writer, Edmund Blackstone, awakens from a nightmare and is deeply disturbed because he has had the same dream many times before. Meanwhile, his wife Nicole prepares their rural estate for a visit from some of Edmund's best friends. The wealthy and obnoxious Charlie, his sexy girlfriend Mikki, and Edmund's mentor Serge and wife Eunice are among the guests. Before the festivities around the lakeside house begin, Edmund's son, Jason, becomes upset when his dog, Aziz, disappears. Edmund later finds the pet dog hanged in the nearby woods.

The weekend party begins, but something more troubling than friends appear. Three specters, all straight from Edmund's imagination, materialize to terrorize the guests. There is the Queen of Evil, the very embodiment of the dark mother goddess (Kali) of the Hindu faith, a nasty (but diminutive) king from French history called the "Spider," and a black-skinned, mute executioner known as the "Jackal." These three villains soon terrorize Edmund's guests and family.

The Queen of Evil informs Edmund and his companions that only one of them will survive the night. She then sets them out on a series of tasks in which the loser is to be executed. Charlie dies of a heart attack after being forced to participate in a race. Eunice dies at the Spider's hand, consumed by her guilty feelings regarding an infidelity. Mikki is desperate to be the sole survivor and challenges Edmund in a knife fight. Edmund kills her instead.

Serge, an old philosopher, handles his death gracefully, and walks nobly to his own execution at the axe of the Jackal. Finally, Edmund must decide if he should give up his wife and son to ensure

his own survival. Revealing himself to be a coward, Edmund chooses self over family, and lets Nicole and Jason be taken by the dark Queen.

Ultimately, however, Edmund's wife, Nicole, is a power of goodness, and she returns from the grave to save her son and punish Edmund for his choice. An ashamed Edmund flees his house, the Spider in hot pursuit. Just as he is being butchered by the dastardly dwarf, Edmund awakens sweaty in his bed and realizes he has had the same nightmare all over again. He breathes a sigh of relief ... and then is confronted with the dark Queen...

Sometime later, Nicole and Jason are shocked to discover that Edmund has died in his sleep from a seizure. He never woke up to enjoy his weekend with his friends...

COMMENTARY: Somewhere inside Oliver Stone's debut feature, *Seizure*, there's a great and meaningful horror movie yearning to find expression. Like an early *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), or contrarily, a latter-day *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, this film could have meaningfully concerned the death phantasm of a writer who has not yet made peace with his life. Unfortunately, characterization and plotting are so weak in the film that *Seizure* seems to change premises every twenty minutes, and ultimately fails to emerge as a cohesive (or coherent) piece of work.

A viewer can see so much provocative material in *Seizure*, and that's part of the problem: it's a film that seemingly has no idea just how good it could be. The premise is so rich and full of possibilities, yet the film itself is fairly empty and dull, given to long static dialogue scenes and confusing happenings. Judging by what is on screen, the film focuses on an imaginative but flawed man who dies in his sleep, the victim of a seizure. In those final instants of his life, he is confronted by his demons, his failings, and his true feelings for his loved ones. Thus each "player" in his death dream represents some facet of his personality, history and character; some facet that he either makes peace with, or fails to make peace with.

Serge, for instance, is Edmund's mentor: a wise, thoughtful writer who faces his death with dignity and perspective. These are all qualities Edmund wishes he too could possess.

Nicole, Edmund's wife, represents the best part of Blackstone: his goodness, his strength, his sense of loyalty even. While dying in his sleep, Edmund acknowledges that he is a coward and that his wife is infinitely better than he is.

Charlie, the money-grubbing friend, could be seen to stand in for Edmund's lust for material wealth and his financial success as a "commercial" writer of horror stories for children. And so it goes.

The three villains, the Jackal, the Spider, and the Queen, are Edmund's literary "creations" come back to taunt and challenge him, his personal demons given life in his suffering subconscious.

If *Seizure* had stuck to that interesting interpretation, it would have been a meaningful film about what it means to die, to face mortality, and to confront the totality of one's life. Instead, *Seizure* introduces too many characters (such as Betsy, the young maid and Gerald, the obnoxious houseguest), only to have them unceremoniously killed in none-too-exciting set pieces. Betsy doesn't seem to represent any particular "internal" battle for Blackstone, so her presence in his dream doesn't make sense.

Ditto for Mikki (Mary Woronov). While it's true that Mary Woronov is lovely, and a welcome addition to the cast, her part would have been so much richer if Mikki somehow related to an element of Edmund's life. Had she been his mistress instead of Charlie's, his embodiment of lust, infidelity, sexual yearning, then she would have fit in better with the thesis the film attempts to develop. Instead, she is just a woman who wants to survive, and betrays Edmund in the process.

Perhaps *Seizure*'s gravest problem is that it can't seem to stick to a single idea and run with it. It begins and ends with the clichéd "is it all a dream?" scenario and then moves into the familiar "haunted writer" territory in which a scribe's own creations terrorize him. Next, *Seizure* resembles a deranged "reality" TV show in which Edmund and his friends must compete for survival. They face challenges and hurdles (such as running around Blackstone's house five times in the pitch black of night). Instead of being voted off the island, however, the loser is killed. The Queen is the bizarre host of the proceedings, and though she doesn't declare the loser to be the

“weakest link,” she might as well. But again, after this challenge, the whole idea of murderous games is dropped in *Seizure*, overturned for something else of interest.

Part of the problem may also be Jonathan Frid’s portrayal of the main character. A great horror icon, Frid brings almost no weight or humanity to Edmund. Ideally, Blackstone should be the center of the film, a force around which all the other characters orbit. Instead, he is a big black hole, a mystery that the audience never understands or even particularly likes. Though given to portentous declarations (such as “I’m scared of something in me”), the audience never identifies with Edmund, or comes to understand what makes him special or unique as a human being.

While watching *Seizure*, this author was reminded of *Don’t Look Now*, and how that film played out like some terrible tragedy because Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie were so damned likable. When Sutherland’s character died at the end of that film, there was a weight to the moment, a sense of something important lost. *Seizure* attempts to mimic Roeg’s stygian; “my life flashed before my eyes” montage, but this time around it is a technique with no impact. We never like Edmund enough to mourn his loss. There’s never that level of connection.

There’s much to appreciate in *Seizure*, including the surreal, avant-garde feel of the piece as a whole. There are moments that are downright kinky, and there’s even an *Alice in Wonderland* quality to the brutality and humor of the picture. But it’s all kind of half-thought-out, and poorly executed. Oliver Stone is one of our greatest directors, and one can see in *Seizure* the seeds of that greatness, but little else.

***Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974) ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Alan Brock (Professor Ernst Prell); Jennifer Stock (Karen Hunter); Tawm Ellis (Dr. Karl Werner); Michael Harris (Keith Henshaw); Tom Grail (Spencer Ste. Claire); Darcy Brown (Lynn

Kelly); Jack Neubeck (Tom Nash); Ivan Agar (Laughing Crow); Luci Brandt (April Ste. Claire); Marina Stefan (Party Hostess); Harriet McFaul (Girl at Party); Dwig Marfield (Station Attendant); Jimmy Silva (Policeman); Warren D'Oly-Rhind (Waiter).

CREW: An Ed Adlum and Mike Findlay Production. *Photographed by:* Robert Findlay. *Sound by:* R.B. Combs. *Edited by:* Mike Findlay. *Screenplay by:* Ed Adlum, Ed Kelleher. *Songs:* “Popcorn” by: Hot Butter; and “Love Shriek” by: Mark Pines and D.C. Joy. *Assistant Cameraman:* Ambrosio Bernal. *Art Direction:* John Zadrio. *Location Coordinator:* Joe Scarpinito. *Costumes:* Ortun. *Make-up:* Makum Kinsky. *Sound Mixing:* Magno Sound. *Production Manager:* Pat Triarch. *Continuity:* Kay Kressi. *Produced by:* Ed Adlum. *Directed by:* Mike Findlay. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Professor Ernst Prell plans to take his university class to remote Boot Island, where they will search for the legendary yeti. On the night before the trip, Prell invites student Keith Henshaw to a “specialty” restaurant that serves an unusual dish called “gin sung.”

Keith’s girlfriend, Karen, is upset that Keith went out with the professor rather than her, and attends a college party instead. There, an unhinged fellow named Spencer reports that three students died on Prell’s last field trip to Boot Island. He tells of a terrible monster and a godforsaken village where all Hell broke loose. Karen dismisses his story as the ramblings of a drunk, but when Spencer goes home that night, he kills his girlfriend, April. As she dies, she retaliates by electrocuting him in the bathtub.

The next day, Prell drives Karen, Keith, and two other students, Lynn and Tom, to Boot Island. There, they stay at the home of Prell’s friend Dr. Karl Werner and his unusual manservant, the mute Laughing Crow. Werner reports that there is a ferocious white yeti in the area, and that Laughing Crow was once attacked by the creature. The students head out on an exploratory trip, and a yeti

kills Tom. The next day, Lynn is killed by the same creature.

Karen begs to go home, but Keith and Prell are obsessed with capturing the beast. When two attempts to snare the yeti fail, Keith learns a secret: there is no yeti, only Werner in a hairy costume! Prell and Warner, along with Laughing Crow, are actually cannibals hoping to scare Karen to death so they can eat her body during a special meeting of the “Covenant,” a society of cannibals! Worse, Keith learns that he has already partaken of human flesh in eating Prell’s favorite dish, gin sung. A desperate Keith tries to rescue Karen before it is too late, but the trap is sprung.

COMMENTARY: *Shriek of the Mutilated* is a grade Z movie bordering on the amateurish. It is a low budget film featuring unknown actors and a deeply silly monster costume. The movie tries to be clever in its final twist, but by the time the so-called surprise has arrived, the audience has already given up because so few of the characters show any signs of intelligence.

The set-up is an interesting one. A university professor takes four students out to the remote woods to find the legendary yeti. Now, that one line description could also result in a brilliant horror film, as evidenced by *The Blair Witch Project*. But the twist here is that there is no yeti at all. Instead, the professor is a cannibal who wants to dine on all but one student, who he hopes to convert to his unusual eating habits. Even that plot could work, maybe, but this film is so badly edited, so lamely acted, so terribly written, that it becomes an exercise in viewing agony. It’s the *Manos: The Hands of Fate* (1966) of the 1970s.

To list all the inanities in this film would be useless, but some are so extraordinary it would be unfair not to make mention of them. Near the film’s opening, for instance, there is a swinging college party sequence set in a busy apartment. All the “hip” young people are excited because ... there’s a popcorn machine (!) at the get-together. Wow! Can you imagine the excitement that might generate? Somebody call the campus authorities, quick!

From that silly touch, the film digresses immediately into a scene of domestic despair as a suicidal student attacks his girlfriend, and she retaliates by electrocuting him. The scene begins with a slit throat

and ends with a man fried in a bathtub. Delightful ... and completely unrelated to the main story at hand.

When the trip to Boot Island has finally begun, the movie's monster is revealed. It attacks Tom, or hops on Tom, more accurately. It is a big, white fluffy thing that looks like a bunny with shorn ears. Even though the monster is supposed to be "fake," part of Prell's ruse, this costume could fool absolutely no one. Not even for a second. The film attempts to cloak the beast by turning the film image "negative" whenever it appears on-screen, but even that can't do the trick.

Shriek of the Mutilated is shot with a deadpan earnestness, and it features an overly melodramatic score, both of which just make the bad monster suit appear that much more ridiculous. The dialogue is unintentionally funny too. In particular, way too much is made of the monster's smell, his "rank, foul odor," and "fetid aroma." Sounds like my college roommate...

But seriously, why the obsession with the monster's smell, since it plays little part in the story? And if it isn't really a monster at all, in the final analysis, then where is the fetid aroma really coming from? Chew on that idea for a while!

Situational logic is also a stumbling block. Two people die horribly, and only then does a student suggest notifying the authorities. By that point, of course, the phone is dead...

And Keith must be the dumbest, most worthless boyfriend in the history of horror films. He doesn't believe anything Karen says, pays her no heed, and yet trusts implicitly everything his crazy professor tells him.

As for Professor Prell, his "twisted" plot is inane. For Karen to taste good, she has to be "scared" when she is eaten, so the last portion of the film involves scaring her to death with ... you guessed it ... the bad yeti costume. Good luck with that, Dr. Prell.

By the way, there are no shrieks in this film, and no one is actually mutilated. For a really amazing (and scary film) about cannibalism, look no further than *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, another low

budget film on the subject. Its director, Tobe Hooper, got everything right. *Shriek of the Mutilated* should be so lucky.

***The Terminal Man* (1974) * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: George Segal (Harry Benson); Joan Hackett (Dr. Janet Ross); Richard A. Dysart (Dr. John Ellis); Jill Clayburgh (Angela Black); Donald Moffat (Dr. Arthur McPherson); Matt Clark (Gerhard); Michael C. Gwynne (Dr. Robert Morris); Normann Burton (Detective Captain Anders); William Hansen (Dr. Ezra Manon); James Sikking (Ralph Friedman); Ian Wolfe (the Priest); Gene Borkan, Burke Byrnes (Benson's Guards); Jim Antonio (Richards); Jordan Rhodes (Questioner #1); Dee Carroll (Night Nurse); Jason Wingreen (Instructor); Steve Kanaly (Edmonds) Al Checco (Farley); Fred Sadoff (Police Doctor); Jack Colvin (Detective); Lee De Broux (Reporter); Robert Elton (Anesthetist); Victor Argo (Orderly).

CREW: *Director of Photography:* Richard H. Kline. *Art Director:* Fred Harpman. *Film Editor:* Robert L. Wolfe. *Unit Production Manager:* Bruce Fowler, Jr. *Costume Designer:* Nino Novaresse. *Sound:* William Randall. *Camera Operator:* Albert Bettcher. *Set Decorator:* Marvin March. *Script Supervisor:* Margaret Tary. *Sound Editor:* Nicholas Stevenson. *Dubbing Mixer:* Hugh Strain. *First Assistant Director:* Dick Moden. *Second Assistant Director:* Leonard Smith, Jr., Robert Dijoux. *Make-up:* Leo Lotito, Jr., Fred Williams. *Hairdresser:* Sherry Wilson. *Casting:* Nessa Hyams. *Goldberg Variation Number 25 by J. S. Bach Played by:* Glenn Gould. *Associate Producer:* Michael Dryhurst. *Based Upon a Novel by:* Michael Crichton. *Screenplay by:* Mike Hodges. *Produced and Directed by:* Mike Hodges. *M.P.A.A Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 107 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A peaceable man named Harry Benson has turned into a violent criminal as a result of a physical injury in an accident. Desperate to be cured of his condition, he is transported to a hospital and scheduled to undergo experimental brain surgery curbing his brutal tendencies. The doctors overseeing this revolutionary procedure think that a form of para-epilepsy makes Benson prone to fits of rage, and so implant in Benson's brain a tiny microcomputer to regulate the malfunction. This procedure is a problem for Benson, however, because he's a computer engineer who believes that machines will some day rule the world. Now, just such a machine is inside his head, controlling his very impulses!

The operation is successful, and the chip (powered by a mini-atomic pack) is inserted in Benson's head to prevent seizures, black outs and violent behavior. After the lengthy and complex surgery, Benson bonds with his psychiatrist, the lovely Janet Ross. Soon, they test his new chip together, and successfully avert a seizure ... ending his violent fits. However, a snag is detected before long. Benson's brain starts to "enjoy" the chip's stimulation, getting a kind of "high" from the feeling, and begins to cause seizures so as to provoke the pleasurable response.

Before long, Benson escapes from the hospital and hitches a ride home with his girlfriend, Angela Black. The scientists grow fearful for Benson (and society at large) because in just a few hours his brain will be triggering constant stimulation of the violence-provoking seizures.

As the scientists scurry to find their lab rat, Benson's brain "activates." At precisely 3:02 A.M., he goes crazy, becoming an uncontrollable killing machine. He brutally murders Angela, and then goes on a rampage at the engineering plant where he helped to develop a new robot.

As the police close in on him, Benson murders a priest, and then shows up at Dr. Ross's house. Fearful of Harry, Ross stabs him with a kitchen knife, even as he begins seizing again. Ross finally escapes from Benson by locking herself away in her bathroom.

Harry flees to a local cemetery and falls into an open grave. There, the police catch up with him and shoot him dead from a circling

helicopter. Undeterred, the scientists plan to repeat the procedure with another subject...

COMMENTARY: Like Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Terminal Man* (based on the novel by Michael Crichton), worries about the day when civil authorities can deploy "modern" technology to treat society's most violent offenders ... and thereby control the individual rights of man. Unlike Kubrick's brutal opera, however, Mike Hodges' film essay heaps most of its scorn on overzealous, unemotional science (rather than the criminal justice system, police, parents, doctors, priests, callow youth, liberal intelligentsia and so on...).

Throughout *The Terminal Man*, the clever art direction (and Hodges' framing) reminds the audience that the lead character, Benson, is at the whim of unfeeling men who respect only their ability to "play God." Benson is thus lost (visually) amidst a world of stark, cold whiteness and unfamiliar, unemotional faces.

Hodges' most clear purpose in adapting Crichton's novel is to reveal how individual freedom and liberty (Benson's) suffers at the hands of a cold society determined to make its citizens "safe" at all costs. He makes this point in several cinematic ways. Firstly, the art direction provides a stunning white-on-white look for *The Terminal Man*. Ivory hospitals, white walls, and doctors in white uniforms dominate the proceedings. The white-on-white motif repeats so much that the film boasts a powerful antiseptic, almost overexposed feeling. If its theme is reminiscent of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, then *The Terminal Man*'s look evokes the perfectly structured universe of the same director's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

The motif of layered whites continues even into the latter portions of the film, when Benson leaves the hospital for the real world. Tellingly, from that point on he is garbed totally in ivory as well. This change in wardrobe seems to indicate that the dangerous Benson is now science's creation, white through and through—just like the world that gave him birth.

Furthermore, all of the violent scenes in the final portion of the film involve shadings of white as well. When Benson kills his girlfriend, Angela, crimson blood stains the purity of the white sheets on a

waterbed. Later, blood also mars a bathroom's immaculate white tile. Even when Benson kills a priest, there is white suffusing the frame, indicating that Christ can't help Benson because science has already "possessed" him.

Finally, Benson ends up in a cemetery and is confronted with—*what else?*—a white tent and white chairs. Wherever he goes then, science follows him. It has changed him and made him a murderer, and even though he's escaped the hospital, resonances of that place (embodied in white) recur everywhere. Science has re-made Benson in its own image, and he is a monster.

Importantly, the scientists of *The Terminal Man* seem to lack individual faces. They're often seen in long shots and groups, as a white mass (mob?) of humanity rather than as specific people with interesting personalities. They are thus depicted as distant and impersonal. Even when the doctors operate on Benson in the surgery theater, they are separated from him physically and emotionally, garbed in helmets and visors. These accouterments distance the men of science from the unholy work they do ... and that work's subject: Benson. He is unimportant to them, except for what theories he can help them prove.

The extended surgery scene may be the best part in the film for getting across Hodges' point about "science gone awry." The sequence is quiet, lengthy, and intentionally rather dull, indicating the doctors don't realize they're involved in something of great moral and personal importance. To them, surgery is just routine; another day on the job. One doctor humorlessly recounts a stupid joke, and it is only indicative of how removed he is from the work he is doing (operating on a human brain...). There is no sense of decorum or respect for the patient during the surgery.

When science isn't represented as cold and unfeeling in *The Terminal Man*, it is instead revealed to be downright cruel. The operation on Benson resembles medieval torture, filled with arcane, painful-looking machinery and devices. As these tools cut deeply into his brain, Benson's head is held static in a painful vise, and later, a long metal probe is inserted into his brain tissue. It is a dehumanizing procedure, and one suspects that that is precisely the point Hodges is making again and again. The scientists don't feel

human, and neither does their work.

The Terminal Man is an interesting and meaningful film, but not an inviting one. There's not a whole lot of human-sounding dialogue in the film, but again this facet of the drama buttresses Hodges' message. Humans communicate through speech, and there's little of that here, just as there is little humanity. Most of what is spoken in the film is technical gobbledygook and jargon, again indicating that science operates on a different playing field than the rest of humanity. It's interesting that Crichton's other horror film of the '70s, *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), so obviously worshipped science, while this film takes the opposite stance and ridicules it. When one scientist describes, straight-faced and monotonously, how Benson will be outfitted with a mini-nuclear pack to power his microchip, the audience is tempted to laugh because the procedure sounds so over the top. It's a ridiculous idea to put a mini-nuclear reactor inside a human body. It's dangerous, silly, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Hippocratic oath. These doctors have lost touch with humanity so much that they don't even realize they are endangering their patient.

Ultimately, *The Terminal Man* fears the day that science and technology can determine and choose human responses to stimuli. It is fearful of that day because the men of science seem to have no care for or understanding of what they have wrought, and therefore take no responsibility for the results of their experiment. Had the film enunciated this through direct dialogue it would have been rather heavy-handed and preachy, and one has to admire Hodges for making a cold film that reflects its subject matter in such powerful visual terms. The frequent incidences of white and the depiction of the scientists as a faceless, humorless mob, all make the point better than dialogue ever could, even if the final result is a film totally lacking in joy and optimism.

The only truly heavy-handed touch in the film seems to be *The Terminal Man's* recurring "signature shot": that of a black screen and an "iris" peep-hole with an eye looking through it at both an off-screen Benson (and by extension) the audience. This shot recurs several times, and seems to hammer home the point that science views the individual (and Benson in particular) as guinea pigs to be

used on a whim. The shot is pretty and well composed, but the point is obvious without the repetition. The frequency of the shot makes the viewer feel as Benson must himself feel—manipulated and slightly out of control. That may have been the point. But Hodges has done his job so well generally in *The Terminal Man* that the audience already “gets it,” even without the technique of putting the audience in Benson’s shoes (or in this case, his prison).

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974) * * * *

Critical Reception

Despite a crippling low budget, it is even somewhat sophisticated, one of the few spawns of *Psycho* ... whose makers actually seem to have learned something from the master of suspense.”—John McCarty, *Psychos*, St. Martin’s Press, 1986, page 133.

“...a vile little piece of sick crap ... a film with literally nothing to recommend it: nothing but a hysterically paced, slapdash, imbecilic concoction of cannibalism, voodoo, astrology ... and unrelenting sadistic violence as extreme and hideous as a complete lack of imagination can possibly make it.”—Stephen Koch, *Harpers*: “Fashions in Pornography”, November 1976, pages 108–111.

“...extremely well-acted and crafted for a low budget film.... Hooper ... strives for terror ... for realism ... it perfectly reproduces our worst nightmare.”—Danny Peary, *Cult Movies*, Delacorte Press, pages 347–350.

“A *reductio ad absurdum* of a horror movie ... ‘unrelenting’ is a good word to use here.... And yet the movie could have been more harrowing. As it stands, there’s surprisingly little blood-and-gore evident. Hooper’s film has a weird sort of tact. The

director trusts his title and his hardware: you don't see what the awful chainsaw does. You don't need to ... the film is informed by a pristine viciousness."—Gordon Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, page 393.

"A decidedly low-tech film with the human screaming getting its first real role since *King Kong* and *The Tingler*. What it lacks in polish it makes up for in its portrayal of 'mad evil'—the kind of inexplicable motivation that made Michael Myers and Bruce the Shark archetypes of the decade. The hitchhiker scene early in the film is one of the most unnerving, terrifying scenes in horror history, still powerful a generation later.—Bill Latham, *Mary's Monster*, Powys Books.

"This abattoir of a movie boasts sledgehammers, meat hooks and chainsaws, and the result, though not especially visceral, is noisy, relentless, and about as subtle as having your leg sawed off without anaesthetic.... Pernicious stuff."—Christ Petit, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 900.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Marilyn Burns (Sally Hardesty); Allen Danziger (Jerry); Paul A. Partain (Franklin Hardesty); William Vail (Kirk); Teri McMinn (Pam); Edwin Neal (Hitchhiker); James Siedow (Old Man); Gunnar Hansen (Leatherface); John Dugan (Grandfather); Robert Courtin (Window Washer); William Creamer (Bearded Man); John Henry Faulk (Storyteller); Jerry Green (Cowboy); Ed Guinn (Cattle Truck Driver); Joe Bill Hogan (Drunk); Perry Lorenze (Pick-up Driver); John Larroquette (Narrator).

CREW: A Vortex/Henkel/Hooper Production. A

film by Tobe Hooper. *Editors:* Sallye Richardson, Larry Carroll. *Cinematographer:* Daniel Pearl. *Production Manager:* Ronald Bozman. *Executive Producer:* Jay Parsley. *Story and Screenplay:* Kim Henkel and Tobe Hooper. *Produced and Directed by:* Tobe Hooper. *Music Score:* Tobe Hooper and Wayne Bell. *Assistant Director:* Sallye Richardson. *Lighting:* Lynn Lochwood. *Assistant Cameraman:* Lou Perryman. *Location Sound Recorder:* Ted Alcolaou. *Post Production Sound/Boom Man:* Wayne Bell. *Art Director:* Robert A. Burns. *Titles and Opticals:* CFI. *Make-up:* Dorothy Pearl. *Camera Assistant:* J. Michael McClary. *Key Grip:* Linn Scherwitz. *Script Girl:* Mary Church. *Additional Photography:* Tobe Hooper. *Re-Recording:* Paul Harrison. *Grip:* Rod Ponton. *Stunt Driver:* Perry Lorenz. *Stunts:* Mary Church. *Associate Producer:* Kim Henkel, Richard Saenz. *Production Assistants:* Ray Spaw, Robert Pustejovski, N. E. Parsley, Sally Nicolaou, Paulette Gochnour, Paula Eaton, Charlie Loring, Jerry Bellnoski, Jim Crow, David Spaw, George Baotz, Tom Foote. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 84 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On a very hot day in August of 1973, young Sally Hardesty, her invalid brother Franklin, and three friends (Jerry, Pam and Kirk), drive out to rural Texas to check on the grave of Sally's grandfather. There has been a rash of grave desecrations in the area, and Sally is concerned that her grandfather's grave may have been disturbed. After determining that there has been no tampering, the group leaves the cemetery and drives off in their van.

Jerry's van passes a slaughterhouse on the road, one where Sally and Franklin's granddad used to sell cattle. The wheelchair-bound Franklin aggravates his friends by explaining, in nauseating detail, the methodology of slaughtering livestock. Not long after, the van stops to pick up a strange hitchhiker, an odd fellow with several nervous tics. Unaware that this guest is actually the local grave desecrator, the kids engage the weirdo in conversation. A former

employee of the slaughterhouse, the hitchhiker lost his job when the organization updated the killing weapon from sledgehammer to mechanical bolt gun.

The hitchhiker grabs Franklin's knife and cuts himself for no reason, after snapping a picture of the group. Then he reveals a straight razor and asks to be taken to his house. The kids ask the stranger to leave, but the visitor grows angry and slices Franklin's arm with the rusty razor. Jerry and Kirk throw the strange hitchhiker out of the van and continue on their way.

Unsettled, they stop for gas at an out-of-the-way barbecue and gas station. To their dismay, the cook at the establishment informs them that the station has no gas, and a transport truck won't arrive for a day.

With little choice, Sally and her friends decide to find the old Hardesty place and hang out there for the night. They drive out to a dilapidated old home on the side of the road. They park in the overgrown front yard and explore the house, briefly noting that the strange hitchhiker left indecipherable symbols (written in his own blood) on the side of the van.

Pam and Kirk go to the old swimming hole behind the remote Hardesty place, and find it dried up. They explore a neighbor's property, thinking that they may have some spare gasoline. Pam and Kirk approach an old farmhouse. When they get no answer at the front door, Kirk opens the unlocked portal and goes inside. Pam waits outside, disturbed because she has found a human tooth on the porch.

Kirk searches the odd house for no more than a minute before a silver metal door to the kitchen slides open, and, without warning, a squealing, masked giant, Leatherface, attacks him. Leatherface smashes Kirk's head with a sledgehammer.

After a time, Pam follows Kirk into the house of horrors. One bedroom upstairs is decorated with furniture made from human and animal bones, and the way to the kitchen is decorated with animal skulls. Leatherface chases Pam, and hangs her on a metal meat-hook in the kitchen. She's still alive and conscious when Leatherface goes

to work with a chainsaw, butchering Kirk like a slab of beef.

Back at the Hardesty place, Jerry, Sally and Franklin wait for the others to return as dusk arrives. Jerry goes in search of his missing friends, leaving Franklin and Sally to quarrel about which of them last had possession of his missing knife. As sun sets, Kirk reaches the farmhouse and finds Pam's blanket there. He goes inside and finds Pam—still alive—in a freezer. Before Jerry can save her, Leatherface clubs and kills him too.

In the pitch of night, Sally and Franklin wait at the van. With no keys and no sign of their missing friends, they go in search of Jerry. Sally pushes Franklin and his heavy wheelchair through a thicket. There, they are confronted by Leatherface ... who impales the crippled Franklin with the chainsaw. Sally runs for her life through the woods, chased by Leatherface. She finds the farmhouse and locks Leatherface outside, but the maniac cuts down the door. Then Sally meets two dead grandparents upstairs, perfectly positioned in easy chairs. She jumps out a window in horror and runs to the roadside barbecue stand. She seeks out the helpful proprietor, but Cook is one of Leatherface's clan and captures her. He returns her to the house, where the crazy hitchhiker is also waiting. Cook is especially upset because Leatherface has ruined the front door.

Sally is invited to a "special" dinner in which she is to be the main course. Sally is tied up and gagged as an elderly—*but not quite dead yet*—Grandpa attempts to bludgeon her with a sledgehammer. At the slaughterhouse, Grandpa used to be the best, but now he's past his prime, despite his family's support. Sally breaks free after Grandpa's fumbling and jumps through a first floor window. Bloodied but free, Sally runs for her life, making for the road beyond.



First he greets you, then he eats you: Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) smiles for the camera in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974).

The hitchhiker and Leatherface pursue Sally, and the hitchhiker is run over by a passing truck. The truck driver pauses to help Sally, but Leatherface attacks the truck's cab, forcing Sally and her would-be savior to run for their lives. Leatherface cuts himself in the leg with the chainsaw when the truck driver strikes him with a wrench.

Finally, a pick-up truck stops and rescues Sally. As she escapes, the psychotic Leatherface fades into the distance, twirling about insanely with his weapon of choice as the dawn comes...

COMMENTARY: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is one of the craziest horror films ever made ... and no doubt one of the best. It is exciting, terrifying, and at times, quite funny. On the surface, it is representative of the 1970s "savage cinema," a film of such hardcore, raw power that the audience recoils from the film's bluntness. On a much deeper level, there is a method to director Tobe Hooper's madness. Specifically, he exploits the language of film to foster the disturbing notion that man's existence, man's toils, means but little in the face of a vast, disordered, and cruel cosmos.

As the opening credits of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* roll, Hooper's camera focuses on close-ups of violent sunspots. The largest image in the frame is one of a red, boiling, almost "popping" sun. This fiery orb, randomly spitting fire and flame into space, is our first significant glimpse into Hooper's larger universe. Importantly, it is not a cosmos of serenity and peace, but one of chaos and eruption. The red shade of the sun speaks of a kind of anger, and that's a running theme in the film. The universe is disordered, anarchic, even cruel.

Rewardingly, the music on the soundtrack reinforces this notion, as it lacks melody of any sort. The music at this point in the film is all cymbal crashes and echoes, highly disordered and discordant. There is no melodic theme running through the music, no leitmotif, only a jumble of ugly sounds strung together in a row. Like the eruptions on the surface of the sun, the music reflects the absence of equilibrium, sanity, reason and order in the universe.

The first shot of the film proper (following the credits) is another image that reveals how the ordered universe has become topsy-turvy. An armadillo (road kill) lies upside down, its dead arms reaching up towards the sky, on a hot asphalt road. Again, the armadillo is overturned, upside down, and that position is a long-time signifier of death in the cinema. More to the point, an animal shouldn't die on the road (a symbol of man's intelligence, and his need to connect one place to another), but it *has* died there, because above man's sense of order (the road), has been imposed the chaos of the universe.

By the time Hooper's camera introduces the main characters, inhabiting their van on the side of a Texas road, he has meaningfully undercut another sense of order. Since the birth of the medium, movies have possessed a thing called *decorum*, a specific manner of viewing things, and a specific methodology in storytelling. Audiences may flock to see horror films, but audiences never expect to see truly unpleasant, unappetizing things. We have our lovely heroes and our hissable villains, our resolution and closure, and the defeat of evil. That's what is expected. Yet Hooper immediately undercuts that sense of decorum, and film structure too.

The first scene featuring the film's protagonists reveals the obnoxious Franklin perched in a wheelchair as he urinates on the side of the road. A truck roars by suddenly and the wind pushes this invalid down a hill, where he lands flat on his face, urine and all. On one hand, this is another overturning of order: the truck swoops in like a bird of prey and flips a human off his perch. More importantly, however, the idea implied by this sequence is that Hooper's movie will feature no favorites, no bigger-than-life "stars," if you will, because that too would represent a kind of order—*cinematic* order. Imagine Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window* facing such a humiliating situation. It just wouldn't happen. But here, it can happen, as Hooper makes plain in the staging. A cripple—usually handled in tender-footed fashion by PC Hollywood—takes an unceremonious spill, and the audience is shocked by such callous treatment. But the point is made: these little, foolish people are not characters in some remote drama. They are us, and they dwell in a universe where terrible things can and do happen, just as they happen in real life.

Compositions of order overturned dominate many frames of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Upon entering the Hardesty home, spiders are seen swarming in a corner of a ceiling. They have overrun their web, yet another symbol of order. Like the dead animal on the road, the image of another "road" (the web) is revealed to be scarred with chaos (teeming spiders). Later, Pam and Kirk go swimming, but instead of finding a water hole, they find only dry earth. Again, expectations are overturned; events seem random. That's very important to any reading of the film.

At other important points in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Hooper takes special pains to accentuate the vastness of the universe at large. This is critical because Hooper sees Sally and her friends in this film much as those very characters view the spiders or the cows in the slaughterhouse. They're little, meaningless creatures running around in their lives with a sort of tunnel vision, unable to see that they inhabit a much larger, and terribly frightening, domain. As human beings, we go to the bank, mow our lawns, eat our dinner, or do a hundred "normal" things, unaware that a tornado could be approaching, or that a serial killer could be roaming the neighborhood. We impose a false sense of order (and hence

security) in our existence, but Tobe Hooper's m.o. is to strip that all away and reveal that nothing separates us from the cows or the spiders, or the ants. We're victims of a universe that unfolds randomly.

Take, for instance, an early shot in the film. Under the uncaring eye of the sun, Jerry's van picks up the hitchhiker in an extreme long shot. Under a giant sky, the hitchhiker and the van itself might as well be ants or cows, and to Hooper they are. Later, there's a beautifully composed tracking shot of Pam and Kirk as they approach the farmhouse where they meet their fate. The camera is positioned low, so the sun is visible all throughout the shot, glaring down on the oblivious characters. As Pam and Kirk move, so does the camera move with them, but, importantly, the sun remains positioned in its orbit ... unmoving. The ants are transitory, even our eye (the camera) is transitory, but the universe moves for no man. It is callous and unconcerned with the "ants" teeming on a tiny world.

Hooper repeats this tracking shot when Pam goes into the house later. Again, there is a lot of sky visible above her, as if it is a player, or at least observer, in the drama. These are instances in which Hooper makes novel use of the low angle shot. He is revealing not the strength of his protagonists (as the low angle is usually designed to depict). Instead, he is revealing the inherent hierarchy (or disorder) of the universe. High above his oblivious characters, stand outer space, suns, and galaxies. And those cosmic "entities" couldn't care less that five teens are about to meet their maker.

The film's dialogue reinforces many of these themes. Franklin's horoscope reads: "you will have a disturbing and unpredictable day." Sally reads her own horoscope, and it is equally frightening. "There are moments when we can't believe what is happening is really true. Pinch yourself and you'll find it is." The horoscope (and astrology in general) represents man's way of imposing order on the universe. Astrology charts the manner in which the planets (the universe at large...) affect man on a daily basis. But Hooper's point is not so much that astrology is real, it's that life is totally random, and that on this horrible day, the horoscopes happen to be right. As

tiny ants with tunnel vision, our actions, our mistakes, our choices, have unforeseen results, especially in a universe of chaos, eruptions and anger. You might wake up one morning, go on a trip, and have no inkling that you will die at the hands of a mad cannibal before the sun sets.

The manner of the death scenes and the structure of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* reinforce this sense of a random, purposeless existence in an existential universe. Take Kirk's death, for instance. There are no Hollywood illusions about it, no instances of heroism or near escape. It is merely brutal. He is clubbed with a sledgehammer and he goes down. His body spasms and jerks until Leatherface delivers a second blow, but then it's over. The whole death scene couldn't but last a few seconds. Again the equation is plain: Kirk is an animal being slaughtered by a cook, nothing more. His death is meaningless on any human scale.

As far as its structure is concerned, the film defies expectations. Pam, Kirk and Jerry all die in exactly the same fashion. They enter the farmhouse, are surprised by Leatherface, and are then killed. No additional information about the killer is learned in subsequent death scenes, no narrative progress is made, and there is no moving forward to the climax. These characters go to the farmhouse; they die. Thus the audience is denied the typical movie "structure" that teaches and informs it about the universe.

Ultimately, the very nature of Leatherface's villainy is a prominent part of Hooper's thesis about the universe too. Leatherface is a man who sees human beings as nothing but meat. He doesn't want to have sex with Sally, he doesn't want to know her as a "person," and he doesn't want her money. He simply desires to clobber her with a sledgehammer, cook her up, and eat her for supper. In this regard, Hooper's film might be viewed as a vegan anthem. Leatherface and his family see no difference between Sally, a rabbit, or a cow. To him, they're all merely ingredients. That's part of the crazy universe too: it doesn't care about predators, and it doesn't make distinctions. On this hot day in August, Sally Hardesty learns that she is no different from the cows in the slaughterhouse where her granddad once worked. Animal flesh is animal flesh, and meat is meat. If cows can be slaughtered and served up for dinner, so then,

can Sally. It's highly disturbing, but *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, like no other film ever made, makes us sympathize with the cows, or the lambs, or any other animal that is slaughtered as food. Hooper's film makes us adopt the perspective of the slaughtered.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is a terrifying film because it surrounds the audience with a universe we dare not contemplate. The heavens don't care about us as "thinking" human beings. Each and every one of us will die one day, and yet the Earth will stay in its orbit. We can be hunted down, treated as cattle, and exposed to every atrocity imaginable, but the sky won't fall, or even protest such treatment. That's an important and terrifying realization because as human beings we all have "egos." We see the world through our own eyes, not the eyes of others. The universe, we think, revolves around our wants and needs. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, by creating villains who see their fellow man as ingredients for barbecue, reminds us that our perception isn't accurate.

There's a strange equation to films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and Tobe Hooper understands it. Insanity is so pronounced in a movie like this that the horror sometimes gives way to nervous laughter. At the same time that the Sawyer family is awful, it is distinctly funny. Sure, the family possesses values different from most, but the Sawyers also reveal universal elements of family life, and we want to laugh at that. Brothers don't always get along (just like Leatherface and the hitchhiker). Grandpa is past his prime, but encouraged by his progeny. The cook is upset by the price of electricity, and so forth. It's a twisted view of family, yet it is still a family. We laugh because we recognize that, despite strange appetites, this family could be ours. After all, the Sawyers gather around the dinner table too—it's just that what they eat differentiates them from us. This is worthy of note too, that there's no superior force at work to end our lives (forces like vampires, aliens, or werewolves). No, the threat here on planet Earth is our own kindred. The values we hold dear aren't the values of others, and again, the universe has no comment on that.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre hovers between unrelenting horror and nervous laughs and is possessed of more raw energy than a

dozen low budget horror films. The cast is good, but it is Tobe Hooper's direction and his concentration on the facts of human life, the here and now of existential existence, that make the movie so incredible (and harrowing) a viewing experience. He has brilliantly created a universe without order and without hope. It is a universe where madmen roam freely, and the skies above just turn the other cheek. It's chilling.

LEGACY: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (like *The Exorcist* before it), changed the nature of horror films while simultaneously meeting much controversy—and much animosity—when it was released. Nonetheless, it spawned a series of “mad” family films, including Wes Craven's similarly themed *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). *Chainsaw* also launched the career of director Tobe Hooper, who went on to direct *Eaten Alive* (1976), *The Funhouse* (1981), *Poltergeist* (1982), *Lifeforce* (1985), *Invaders from Mars* (1986), *The Mangler* (1995), as well as the mini-series *Salem's Lot* (1978), the TV-movie *I'm Dangerous Tonight* (1990), and episodes of *Amazing Stories* (1985–87), *Freddy's Nightmares* (1988–89), *Tales from the Crypt* (1989–96), *Nowhere Man* (1995–1996), *Dark Skies* (1996–97), and *The Others* (2000).

As for *Leatherface*, his family reappeared in three sequels: the Hooper-directed *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1987), *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* (1989), and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* (1995), the last of which was directed by original scribe Kim Henkel and starred Matthew McConaughey and Rene Zellweger.

Vampyres

Cast & Crew

CAST: Marianne Morris (Fran); Anulka Dziubinska (Miriam); Murray Brown (Ted); Brian Deacon (John); Sally Faulkner (Harriet).

CREW: *Directed by:* Jose Ramon Larraz. *Written by:* D. Daubeney. *Director of Photography:* Harry Waxman. *Editor:* Geoffrey Brown. *Essay Films.*

M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 84 minutes.

DETAILS: A sexually charged vampire thriller, with more emphasis on the sex than the thrills. The vampires are lesbians, and they feed on passersby at an old house. Strangely compelling.

1975

Beyond the Door (1975) * ½

Cast & Crew

NOTE: The Media edition of *Beyond the Door* features no opening credits, except a listing for Juliet Mills and Richard Johnson.

CAST: Juliet Mills (Jessica Barrett); Richard Johnson (Dimitri); Elizabeth Turner, David Colin, Jr.

CREW: Edward L. Montoro and Film Ventures International Present *Beyond the Door*. *Screenplay:* Richard Barrett. *Directed by:* Oliver Hellman. *Assistant Director, Second Unit:* Luciano Palermo. *Continuity:* Patrizia Zulini. *Assistant Cameramen:* Maurizio Maggi, Morio Bagnato. *Hairstylist:* Giancarlo De Honardis. *Sound Mixer:* Bruno Brunacei. *Boom Operator:* Adolfo Fabrizi. *Assistant to Art Director:* Giancarlo Stella. *Assistant Editor:* Bruno Sguelgia. *Dialogue Editor:* Christopher Cruise. *Sound Effects:* Roberto Arcangeli. Interiors were filmed at De Paolis Studios, Rome, Italy; exteriors were filmed in San Francisco, U.S.A. *M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 97 minutes.*

SYNOPSIS: A decade ago, a bearded fellow named Dimitri would have died in a car crash, but the Devil granted him ten additional years of life on Earth. Now, as those ten years end, Dimitri is

desperate for another extension. The Devil will oblige, if Dimitri functions as his go-between, and rips the baby out of Jessica Barrett's womb. Jessica, it seems, is Dimitri's former lover of many years earlier.

Unaware of the spectral events swirling about her, Jessica announces to Robert, her husband, that a third child is on the way ... even though she is on the pill. Robert is not especially pleased, since his two children, Ken and Gail, are in a particularly obnoxious "swearing" stage. Almost immediately into her unusual pregnancy, Jessica has bad feelings about the baby inside, fearing it will kill her. She is also troubled by bad dreams, and even imagines that sometimes she hears the Devil's laughter. Equally odd, the baby seems to be developing rapidly—three months of growth after only seven weeks!

As Jessica's behavior grows stranger during the pregnancy, demonic forces taunt Ken and Gail, and their dolls and toys come to life. Robert learns that his children are terrified, and fears that Jessica is possessed by the Devil. He seeks the help of Dimitri, who claims that Jessica is the "prey of a negative force." Dimitri also tells Robert that the child must be born at all costs. Robert is inclined to believe Dimitri, especially when Jessica's head spins around, and she spits up green vomit. Talking in multiple voices (including that of the Devil), Jessica also uses psychokinetic powers to torture Robert.

Dimitri intervenes when Jessica delivers her baby, but fails to fulfill his part of the evil bargain and lets the child live. The Devil kills Dimitri even as a strange mouthless child is born ... and then dies. The possession over, Jessica returns to normal. But little Kenny seems to be possessed now...

COMMENTARY: An innocent woman is inexplicably possessed by an evil force, perhaps by the Devil himself. Medical science can't help, and the possessed female spits green vomit, and her head spins around completely. Finally, out of nowhere, a mysterious man arrives to help save the endangered soul, but there will be a crisis of faith and morality before anyone is saved. In the end, a final sacrifice resolves the terror....

No, the preceding description is not a synopsis of William Friedkin's landmark film *The Exorcist* (1973), it's the plot of an imitative Italian hack job called *Beyond the Door*. "Oh God, I only wish I could forget the whole thing," a character solemnly intones early in the film, and this critic is inclined to agree with that assessment. With the exception of 1976's *Grizzly* (which studiously ripped off *Jaws*), there has rarely been a more derivative film than *Beyond the Door*. The director has apparently studied *The Exorcist* quite diligently, but has little clue how to generate the same level of emotional attachment to his film's characters.

For instance, both films center on a family in danger: the MacNeils in *The Exorcist*, the Barretts in *Beyond the Door*. In the former, a tender mother child-relationship was forged, and the audience saw evidence of strong family bonds. Viewers witnessed Regan and her mom visiting Washington monuments together and sharing a cute but believable rapport. When Regan's behavior changed and she turned into a violent, verbally abusive monster, the transformation was startling.

In the latter film, there is a running joke about how the Barrett children cuss like sailors (a symptom of possession in *The Exorcist*...) from the get-go. They use the word "asshole," implore one-another to "go stuff yourself," and even say "bullshit." These are not exactly charming kids, and the presence of foul-mouthed children instantly distances the audience rather than drawing it in. We're supposed to care about these little potty-mouths, but unlike Regan (and Linda Blair), the child performers have no charisma, and no character arc to travel. The final revelation, that one of the children is possessed, smacks more of a cheap, gimmicky ending than it does a tragic character development.

If the truth were told, this is a pretty weird family even before the demonic possession starts. Mr. Barrett charmingly refers to his unborn child as a "little bastard" (at least the children came by their vocabulary honestly...) and we don't connect with these actors in a meaningful way. It may be simply because their lines are dubbed in English (this is an Italian film, remember), and that tends to be an off-putting and humorous technique ... not at all conducive to empathy. We've been conditioned by generations of *Godzilla*

films to see dubbing as inherently silly, and that “tradition” carries over to this mess.

And Richard Johnson, generally an admirable and solid performer, is also miscast in this film, coming across as ponderous, slow and barely conscious. He doesn't exactly seem like the charismatic, unforgettable lover Mills describes with so much enthusiasm. His fear of dying is revealed primarily through the Devil's voiceovers, not through Johnson's performance, and that's a serious weakness of the film, since that dread is Johnson's motivation, and the fear he must overcome. His sacrifice has little meaning (and even less emotional weight) because his fear of death is not suitably enunciated by the character himself. When he is “taken off” at the climax of the film (presumably to eternal damnation in Hell...) the moment should cause a lump in the throat. It doesn't.

And the special effects? They're quite good in spots, but are, inevitably, leftovers from *The Exorcist*. A head spinning here, a pile of green vomit there, some random objects flying about on their own ... this is all in conjunction with a possession, the same plot point informing *The Exorcist*. American audiences thronged to this movie, and it was a huge hit, because they longed to relive the visceral experience of the Friedkin movie. In a sense then, *Beyond the Door* obliged. It is as much a special effects rerun as a new film.

Beyond the Door could have been an involving personal story, the tale of a husband who puts aside his jealousy for a wife's former lover so as to help her when she is possessed. There are hints of that human story throughout the film, but the movie just isn't smart enough to play up the human angle. Instead, it thrives on generic dialogue (“she's under a kind of arcane influence,” Johnson explains cryptically at one point), and special effects set pieces. In addition, the film fails to exploit its San Francisco setting to the same degree that Georgetown was utilized in *The Exorcist*. All in all its an unpleasant film, and one has to wonder about all those poor souls who actually went to the theater and sat through this noxious variation on a great film. If *Beyond the Door* has any value, it is in remembering the period, circa 1974–76, when every new horror film (*Abby*, *To the Devil a Daughter*, *Beyond the Door*, *House of Exorcism*, *The Omen*) was seeking to cash in on *The Exorcist*'s

blockbuster status.

Blood Waters of Dr. Z

Cast & Crew

CAST: Marshall Gracier (Dr. Leopold); Wade Popwell (the Monster); Paul Galloway (Sheriff Krantz); Gerald Cruse (Marine Biologist); Sanna Ringhaver (Agent Walsh); Dave Dickson (Stevens); Adrie Valliere (Deputy Sheriff).

CREW: *Written, Produced and Directed by:* Don Barton. *Original Story by:* Ron Kivett, Lee O'Larew. *Director of Photography:* Jack McGowan. *Electronic Music:* Jack Tamul. *Monster Costume:* Ron Kivett, Martin Fillyaw, Les Lancaster. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approximate).

DETAILS: Filmed in Florida, this is the story of a deranged scientist who keeps a big tub in his lab. One day, the scientist injects himself with a special formula, strips down, swims with the fishes in the tub, and transforms himself into one of the cheesiest monsters in film history.

The Bug (a.k.a. Bug) (1975) * * ½

Critical Reception

“One has only sympathy for Bradford Dillman, who struggles embarrassingly with the impossible role of the scientist.... Most of the dialogue is laughable. Producer Castle and Thomas Page have adapted the latter’s sci-fi novel, *The Hephaestus Plague* into a frequently boring, often confusing film which will disappoint even the most ardent sci-fi fans.”—Michael Buckley, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVI, Number 8, October 1975, page 504.

“*Bug* is decidedly poisonous. It is not simply a scary

picture, nor [sic] simply a violent one. It is a cruel picture ... sick, and literally sickening.”—Richard Eder, *New York Times*, September 18, 1975, page 50.

“Tacky in parts ... and occasionally lacking in plot logic, it’s nevertheless an imaginative little B thriller that manages to be genuinely suspenseful.”—Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 120.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Bradford Dillman (James Parmintir); Joanne Miles (Carrie Parmintir); Richard Gilliland (Gerald Metbaum); Jennie Smith Jackson (Norma Tucker); Alan Fudge (Mark Ross); Jesse Vint (Tom Tacker); Patty McCormack (Sylvia Ross); Brendan Dillon (Charlie); Fred Deans (Henry Tacker); James Green (Reverend Kern); Jim Payne (Kenny Tacker); Bard Stevens (Security Guard).

CREW: Distributed by Paramount Pictures. William Castle’s Production of *The Bug*. *Art Director:* Jack Martin Smith. *Editor:* Allan Jacobs. *Assistant Director:* Jack Roe. *Insect Sequences:* Ken Middleham. *Wardrobe:* Ken Verhille. *Electronic Music:* Charles Fox. *Director of Photography:* Michel Hugo. *Based on the Novel by:* Thomas Page. *Screenplay:* William Castle and Thomas Page. *Produced by:* William Castle. *Directed by:* Jeannot Szwarc. *Make-up:* Tom Miller, Jr. *Set Decorator:* Reg Allen. *Hairdresser:* Judy Alexander. *Camera Operator:* Herb Pearl. *Special Effects:* Phil Cory. *Property Master:* Allan Gordon. *Casting:* Ramsay King. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Color by:* Movielab. *Titles:* Modern Film Effects. *Script Supervisor:* Cynnie Troup. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 100 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: The town of Riverside, California, is turned upside down by a terrible earthquake that not only destroys the town church but releases a plague of deadly cockroaches never before seen by man. A professor at a local university, Jim Parmintir, believes the insects may be millions of years old—the oldest species on Earth, in fact. These six-legged creatures have clawed legs, two body sections and a high metabolic rate. More interesting than those characteristics, the eyeless bugs have the capacity to make fire when they rub their dorsal, chitinous antennae together. This unusual ability causes havoc all over Riverside as cars explode, buildings burn, and fields go up in flames.

Parmintir soon realizes that the insects are relatively immobile because of the air pressure on Earth's surface. In effect, the insects have the bends. Despite this handicap, the critters are transported all across Riverside by man's own creations, specifically cars and pick-up trucks (to which they attach themselves...). Excited by the thought of a newly discovered species, Parmintir determines to breed the Riverside cockroaches with a more common variety of the species to see what unusual characteristics might carry over to the next generation.

Meanwhile, the bugs do more damage to the town. Among the many victims are a curious cat, a student's unsuspecting girlfriend, and eventually Parmintir's wife, Carrie. His wife's death sends Parmintir over the brink of sanity, and he sets up an impromptu science lab at an isolated house in the field where the bugs were first discovered. Parmintir carries out his plan to breed the insects, and the next generation is soon born. This new generation is more resistant to pressure, eats raw meat, has an incredible hive mind, and the capacity to learn language. Parmintir soon becomes a kind of God to these new, dangerously intelligent insects. One night, they break out of their container and start to suck blood from Parmintir's shirtless chest as he sleeps. Now, the bugs have a taste for humans.

Parmintir continues to lose his grip on both sanity and science as the bugs gain the upper hand. Another generation is born—this one with the ability to fly. One night, the fiery, winged insects attack Parmintir, and see to it that he falls deep into the hellish crevice from which they sprung. Then, the bugs return to the crevice, as if

following their father to Hell. Another earthquake seals up the whole kit and caboodle (including the deranged Parmintir...) beneath the Earth.

COMMENTARY: What can be said of a film in which cockroaches pass explosive fire out of their rear ends?

Shot on location in the desert town of Riverside, California, *The Bug* is a low-budget collaboration of director Jeannot Szwarc, alumni of *Rod Serling's Night Gallery* (1970-73), and shlockmeister William Castle of *The Tingler* (1959), *The House on Haunted Hill* (1959), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and the TV series *Ghost Story* (1972). Both men have solid reputations in the horror field, and have done good work one many occasions, but *The Bug* (or *Bug* as it is most commonly known) is not representative of either artist at his best.

Some elements of the story work fairly well, especially in the opening moments of the picture. As a priest sermonizes about fire and brimstone, and about a contemporary America filled with sin, suspicion and death, an earthquake rocks the establishment. It is as if God has spoken, and appropriately, the quake is of Biblical proportions, causing walls to crack and split, and floors to undulate. Like a plague from the Old Testament, or the hand of a wrathful God, this earthquake signals the arrival of God's vengeful hand: the monstrous bugs.

The religious metaphor is carried on for some time. The insects cause a bush to burn at one point (another Old Testament reference...), and later, Parmintir assumes the role of a pride-filled Prometheus, controlling and breeding the insects by his own whim and hubris. Eventually, of course, the bugs rebel against this pretender to deity-hood, and destroy him for his trespasses. Disturbed by his own God complex, even Parmintir continually notes that he has "gone too far," and the message is clearly one that comes straight from the B movies of the 1950s: Do not tamper in God's domain. Period.

The Bug also concerns itself with Parmintir's belief that man can "talk" to the Earth and all the creatures on it. He thinks that this ability is an innate characteristic of mankind that has been lost over time, but again, this conceit is revealed as hubris. Such knowledge

is apparently meant for the Creator alone, and Parmintir ultimately dies for seeking to go beyond man's purview. Though its point is somewhat anti knowledge, and definitely old fashioned, *Bug* adheres to its themes well, and the burning bush, the earthquake, and other tragedies portend a spiritual apocalypse. That's an interesting twist in the secular 70s.

The special effects are also quite good for a low-budget production. The insect photography is great, and so are the mechanical effects. When the winged roaches start flying about, they look pretty convincing. All the fire and earthquake effects are convincing too.

Yet the film goes wrong in the final half hour as Parmintir becomes an insane recluse. His descent from intrepid university professor to overreaching God-figure is not charted in a very satisfactory fashion. He grows a beard (symbolizing, apparently, his disaffection with human society), retreats to the woods, becomes a hermit, and goes absolutely bonkers. Bradford Dillman is a good actor, but his character's motivations are not clear. He is clearly "angry" that the bugs have killed his wife, but then becomes their protector and messiah, breeding new generations of the monsters. So, does he hate them, or does he love them? Is he mad at them for his wife's death, or is he their spiritual father, assuring their development and survival? The movie plays it both ways, with less-than-convincing results.

While watching this movie, the author thought of two other productions that successfully expanded on the ideas proposed in *Bug*. The first was the two-hour premiere of the new *The Outer Limits* anthology, entitled "The Sand Kings." In it, a professor (portrayed by Beau Bridges) became a God figure to a race of microscopic aliens. They demonstrated their intelligence by building a monument in sand to their "God"—a sculpture of his face. Just as the insects of *The Bug* spelled out words and sentences (such as "WE LIVE") for Parmintir, so do the aliens of *The Outer Limits* attempt to communicate with a creature who considers himself "above them."

The second production that recalls *Bug* is *Mimic*, an excellent 1997 horror film about an irresponsible scientist (Mira Sorvino) who breeds insects (playing God) to wipe out a plague in New York City.

Unfortunately, the beasties adapt beyond science's understanding, and threaten mankind's prominence. In both situations, a scientist's "altering" of nature's plan nearly has catastrophic results.

Mimic and *The Outer Limits*, one must admit, are rather more adept in enunciating their themes than *The Bug*, but *The Bug* (based on the novel *The Hephaestus Plague*) is an earlier, perhaps prehistoric meditation on the same thoughts. It's a slow-paced, mildly entertaining film with some provocative moments. If the professor's mental disintegration had been carried off with a bit more aplomb, the film might have merited three stars. One thing's for sure: the bugs are great. Gassy, but great.

***The Devil's Rain* (1975) * ***

Critical Reception

"The quality of writing, acting and directing give a general and routine witlessness to this movie.... The weave of black cloth used to blot out the eyes shows up clearly. The stuff leaking from the bodies is foamily chemical.... It is as horrible as watching an egg fry."—Richard Eder, *New York Times*, August 8, 1975, page 11.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Ernest Borgnine (Jonathan Corbis); Eddie Albert (Dr. Sam Richards); William Shatner (Mark Preston/Martin Fyffe); Keenan Wynn (Sheriff Owens); Tom Skerritt (Tom Preston); Joan Pratner (Julie Preston); Ida Lupino (Mrs. Preston); Woodrow Chambliss (John); John Travolta (Danny); Claudio Brook (Preacher); Lisa Todd (Lillith); George Sawaya (Steve Preston); Erika Carlson (Aaronessa Fyffe); Tony Cortez (First Captor); Anton Lavey (High Priest); Diane Lavey (Priscilla Corbis); Robert Wallace (Matthew Corbis).

CREW: Bryanston Distributors Inc. Presents a

Sandy Howard Production, *The Devil's Rain*.
Technical Advisor: Anton Szandor Lavey, High Priest
of the Church of Satan. *Associate Producer*: Gerald
Hopman. *Production Assistant*: Ted Pravin. *First
Assistant Director*: Mario Cisneros. *Production
Designer*: Nikita Knatz. *Special Photographic Effects*:
Film Effects of Hollywood, Linwood G. Dunn, Don
W. Weed. *Videotape Production*: Sony International
Corporation, Jaime H. Shandera, James A.
Menorala. *Second Unit Director*: Rafael Portillo. *Art
Director*: Jose Rodriguez Granada. *Camera Operator*:
Felipe L. Mariscal. *Sound Mixer*: Manuel Topete.
Sound Effects Editor: Gene Eliot. *Dialogue Editor*:
Tony Garber. *Music Editor*: Milton Lustig. *Wardrobe*:
Carol Wenger. *Set Decoration*: Carlos Granjean.
Assistant Film Editor: Peter Berger. *Script Supervisor*:
Ana Maria Quintana. *Production Coordinator*: Linda
Sony. *Make-up*: The Burmans Studio. *Special Effects*:
Cliff and Carol Wenger, Thoms Fisher, Frederico
Farfan. *Title Backgrounds from Paintings by*:
Hieronymus Bosch. *Photographed in*: TODD AO-35.
Locations by: Cinemobile Systems. *In Charge of
Production*: Terry Morse, Jr. *Casting*: Lea Stalmaster.
Music Composed and Conducted by: Al De Lory. *Film
Editor*: Michael Kahn. *Director of Photography*: Alex
Phillips, Jr. *Written by*: Gabe Essoe, James Ashton,
Gerald Hopman. *Produced by*: James V. Cullen,
Michael S. Glick. *Directed by*: Robert Fuest.
M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. *Running Time*: 86 minutes.

P.O.V.

“I wondered how they got the money to make it. The director was an English fellow who had a marvelous sense of humor. He and I were talking about things we could do with the script that would enrich it, make it more funny ... and tongue and cheek.... And halfway through it the producers had us re-shoot the stuff. They wanted a straight horror picture.... I knew it would be a disaster”²⁴.—Tom

Skerritt reflects on his first horror feature, *The Devil's Rain* (1975).

SYNOPSIS: On a rainy night, Mark Preston returns home to his southwestern ranch to tell his mother that he was not able to find his missing father out in the raging storm. Then, a man appearing to be Mark's father, shows up at the homestead and warns that Corbis wants "his book" returned. After delivering this message, Mr. Preston's face promptly melts away....

Mark and his mother are convinced Corbis is trying to trick them, and that he is really holding Mr. Preston captive in a nearby ghost-town, Redstone. Mrs. Preston wants Mark to return the all-important book, which she keeps hidden in the floor board, but Mark refuses to give the devilish Corbis what he so deeply desires. Instead, Mark arms himself with a pistol, and determines to rescue his father. Mrs. Preston provides Mark with a magic amulet that prevents harm by Corbis.

When a truck pulls up outside the ranch, Mark checks it out, only to learn it is a diversion. He returns inside to find his mother abducted by Corbis. Now Mark has two people to rescue.

Mark drives to Redstone and meets Corbis there, who again demands the book. The two men confront one another, faith against faith. If Preston wins, he gets his parents back. If he loses, he hands over the book, and his eternal soul, to Corbis. The battle occurs in a church during a black mass, and Mark sees that his mother has been converted to evil, her eyes black pools. Mark attempts to escape, but is overpowered by Corbis's minions. When he loses the amulet, Mark is lost ... converted to evil like the rest of his family.

Elsewhere, Mark's brother, Tom, and his wife, Julie, conduct experiments in parapsychology with Dr. Sam Richards. During one ESP experiment, Julie has visions of the Corbis church, and realizes Mark is in danger. Julie, Tom and Sam head to Redstone to save Mark. They investigate the strange story of Corbis, and learn that in times past he was called Pilgrim Corbis, and his book was stolen. He believes it was someone in his flock who stole the book because the ledger names all those who have conspired with Satan. Without the book and its register of names, Corbis cannot lead his people to the

kingdom of Satan, and his minions are doomed to everlasting limbo.

As it turns out, the thief was the wife of Martin Fyfe, a dead ringer for Mark Preston. Though she was burned at the stake, Corbis then swore to track the Fyfes (or the Prestons...) for all eternity until the book was once more in his possession.

After this strange vision, Tom heads off armed with a rifle to confront Corbis. Julie is captured by Mrs. Preston, now a servant of the devil. Tom infiltrates the coven to rescue his brother, Mark, but Mark is now an eyeless servant too, while Corbis has transformed into a horned demon.

Tom is outed at the mass as a blasphemer and he flees the ceremony, opening fire on Corbis's cloaked minions. Tom escapes and tells Dr. Richards about what has happened. He studies Corbis's book and realizes that these are the names of people who converted to Satanism 300 years earlier. If Tom turns over the book, their souls will be delivered to the Devil and doomed for eternity. Sam and Tom return to the church to rescue Julie, and they realize that Corbis is trapping all those souls in limbo in demonic crystal balls.

When Corbis steals the book from Tom, Sam threatens to destroy the crystal bottle containing the "Devil's Rain." The converted Mark gets his hands on the crystal dome himself, and seeking freedom, shatters it. An unearthly rain pours into the church, melting Corbis and all his followers. Tom and Sam free Julie and try to escape the wrath of Corbis, but the demon has one more trick up his sleeve. Unable to escape the scalding Devil's rain, Corbis jumps into Julie's body, imprisoning Julie's soul in limbo for all eternity...

COMMENTARY: Very few films can make the claim that the high priest of the Church of Satan was the production's technical advisor. Even fewer films would *want* to make that claim. That unsavory *The Devil's Rain* credit, which smacks of exploitation value more than it reflects the film's accuracy in depicting satanic rites, sets the tone of the movie. Like the rain that destroys its principals in the finale, the *Devil's Rain* is a goopy mess.

And this is a genuine surprise, since the director of *The Devil's Rain* is Robert Fuest, the same talent behind the riveting 1970 psycho-

thriller *And Soon the Darkness*, and the sardonic *Phibes* films. He's a particularly clever director, but seems undone here by a story that never really comes together. An additional problem is that the film begins with a strong audience identification with one cast (Lupino and Shatner), and then switches to a new, more bland set (Skerritt, Albert and Pratner). Lupino and Shatner are sort of involving in their desperation, whereas Skerritt, Albert and Pratner have no idea what is going on, and therefore don't present much of a match for Borgnine's Corbis.

Albert is badly miscast in *The Devil's Rain*. He carries no psychic weight, no authority, as the "expert" in the occult/paranormal, Sam Richards. Maybe it's merely the echo of those years spent on *Green Acres*, but Albert is far too amiable for the audience to imagine him grappling with Satanists. This doesn't mean Albert is a bad actor, just that he is not used effectively in this film. In 1984, in the film *Dreamscape*, Albert portrayed a kindly Reagan-esque president plagued by nightmares of nuclear war, and his persona of decency and gentility worked splendidly in that environment. But it does not here, when he is meant to be a sharp-minded authority on the occult.

The Devil's Rain starts promisingly. The film displays a variety of Hieronymus Bosch paintings over the opening credits, and these disturbing images are edited to plaintive moaning on the soundtrack. These odd works of art depict inhuman, monstrous devils committing unspeakable acts upon men and women. The moaning becomes a discordant din, and the effect is one of discomfort. That sets the tone of tension, and the film opens with a thunderclap, and the shadow of a hand moving a cross a crucifix on the wall. The combination of the devilish art, the storm, and the religious icon lend the opening moments an expressionist feel in the best sense of that word.

From there, a man's face melts, deteriorating into a pile of goop before our very eyes. This is a startling effect, and quite effectively placed at the beginning of the film, because the audience is not prepared for it. Beginning *in medias res*, the film then proceeds with little explanation, as the concerned Shatner and Lupino discuss their frightening situation.

The opening sequence leads to a confrontation, faith against faith, between Borgnine's devil and Shatner's hero, and there is a frightening sequence as Shatner flees the church after he is tricked into removing his protective amulet. A "swarm" of Satanists descend on him, and it is kind of scary too. But once Shatner is out of the picture, the film never recovers the same momentum or interest.

Also, there's a gaffe in situational logic in the film. Only two people in the world know where Corbis's book is hidden: Mark Preston (Shatner) and his mother (Lupino). Yet, by a third of the way through the picture, both of these characters have been converted to evil, so there should be no further conflict. As enslaved disciples of Corbis, why do they simply not reveal the location of the book to their new master? The earlier battle of fates seems to establish that Corbis, as "Satan's minister on Earth," is more powerful than any human's will, so why does he not just demand of his converts that they reveal the location of the book? This question is never answered.

If the plot has flaws, it is not buttressed in any way by the special effects, which do not bear close scrutiny. The melting of Mr. Preston is an effective moment at the opening of the picture, but each subsequent melting becomes less impressive simply because it provides time and opportunity to examine the same effect again and again. By the time of the final "rain" that wipes out Borgnine's flock, it is clear that the melting flesh is merely hot wax. Thus the end of the movie is sloppy, mucky, yucky, and wholly ineffective. It looks like a sprinkler system has destroyed the denizens of a wax museum.

In another effects botch, it is clear on several occasions that the "black" eyes of Lupino and other Corbis disciples are actually made of stitched cloth, sewed in over the performers' real eye sockets. The "fake" eyes are incredibly obvious, yet Fuest obsesses on them in numerous close-ups.

The Devil's Rain has some interesting flourishes. The American Southwest, the primary setting of the film, has since become a favorite of horror directors, from *Near Dark* (1987) and *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1995) to *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1998). The ghost-

town setting of the film is used to good effect here, even if it is never explained how (and when) Corbis and his people migrate from New England to the other side of the country.

Ernest Borgnine makes for a strong villain as Corbis, and there is a sense of terror underlying many moments of the film. A strong jolt comes when an eyeless, black-cloaked Lupino pops up in the back seat of Julie's car unexpectedly. But even these fine horror moments don't forge a very satisfying experience. The trick ending makes no sense, and since the audience has nothing invested in the movie's second string (Skerritt, Pratner and Albert), the final "possession" has but little impact. Fuest is a great director, and an important one to the genre, but this film is nothing to crow about. The plot structure robs the film of its most interesting characters early on, and the heavily scrutinized special effects only reveal them for what they are: special effects. *The Devil's Rain* is a sad punctuation for Fuest's 1970s horror career.

LEGACY: Today, *The Devil's Rain* is remembered primarily as John Travolta's first feature film. He plays one of Corbis's cloaked followers, and delivers the immortal line: "*Blasphemer!*" Other than that, he doesn't make much of an impression.

It is also interesting to note that *The Devil's Rain* "melting face" ending was later repeated lock, stock and barrel in the far superior Spielberg production *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

The Giant Spider Invasion

Cast & Crew

CAST: Steve Brodie (Dr. Vance); Barbara Hale (Dr. Jenny Langer); Robert Easton (Hester); Leslie Parrish (Ev); Alan Hale (Sheriff); Bill Williams (Dutch); Kevin Brodie (Perkins); Dianne Lee Hart (Terry); Paul Bentzen (Billy).

CREW: *Directed by:* Bill Rebane. *Screenplay by:* Richard L. Huff and Robert Easton. *From an Original Story by:* Richard L. Huff. *Produced by:* Bill Rebane

and Richard L. Huff. *Executive Producer*: William W. Gillett, Jr. *Director of Cinematography*: Jack Willoughby. *Film Editor*: Barbara Pokras. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 90 minutes (approximate).

DETAILS: An infamous (notorious?) cult-classic, *The Giant Spider Invasion* concerns the chaos that ensues when a black hole (!?) opens up in rural Wisconsin and drops alien spider eggs across the countryside. Alan Hale (the Skipper of *Gilligan's Island*), is hilariously miscast as the town sheriff, and Robert Easton plays a reprobate redneck. Two past-their-prime scientists (Steve Brodie and Barbara Hale) team up to stop the carnivorous giant spider (a Volkswagen beetle disguised as an arachnid...) from destroying the town fair. This one must be seen to be believed.

In Search of Dracula

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Lee (Narrator).

CREW: *Produced and Directed by*: Calvin Floyd.
Written by: Yvonne Floyd. *Photography*: Tony Forsberg. *Music*: Calvin Floyd. Independent International Pictures Releasing Corporation.
M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. *Running Time*: 86 minutes.

DETAILS: This 1975 documentary, hosted by Christopher Lee, followed the legend of Dracula, and the life of Bram Stoker's inspiration, the notorious Vlad the Impaler. Replete with recreations of Vlad's life (in which Lee played the count), this installment in a documentary film series was part of a '70s fad that also included such films as *In Search of Noah's Ark*, *In Search of Big Foot*, and *In Search of Historic Jesus*.

*Jaws (1975) * * * **

Critical Reception

“...a sensationally effective action picture—a scary thriller that works all the better because it’s populated with characters that have been developed into human beings.... It’s a film as frightening as *The Exorcist*, and yet it’s a nicer kind of fright.”—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert’s Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 329.

“...eminently worth seeing for its second half: three men against a killer shark, but up to this point *Jaws* is often flawed by its busyness.... Agitated actors shout, argue, and trample heavily on one another’s lines ... chilling high adventure, destined for box office statistics.”—Marsha Magill, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVI, Number 7, September 1975, page 436.

“...the most efficient manipulation of mass emotion in the cinema since *Psycho*.... Several sequences have become suspense classics.”—Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, Bison Books Ltd., 1986, page 36.

“While primarily an adventure film, the opening scene of a young woman being attacked by Spielberg’s great white shark is certainly as horrific as Hitchcock’s famous shower scene, even with its none-too-subtle allusions to *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. While human beings have always been a reluctant part of the food chain, *Jaws* showed the actual process like no other film—stepping out of the cinema and actually influencing the culture (by keeping people out of the ocean for years to come).”—Bill Latham, *Mary’s Monster*, Powys Books.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Roy Scheider (Chief Martin Brody); Robert

Shaw (Quint); Richard Dreyfuss (Matt Hooper); Lorraine Gary (Ellen Brody); Murray Hamilton (Vaughn); Carl Gottlieb (Meadows); Jeffrey C. Kramer (Hendricks); Susan Backline (Chrissy); Jonathan Filley (Cassidy); Ted Grossman (Estuary Victim); Chris Rebellow (Michael Brody); Jay Mello (Sean Brody); Lee Fiero (Mrs. Kintner); Jeffrey Voorhees (Alex Kintner); Craig Kingsbury (Ben Gardner); Dr. Robert Nevin (Medical Examiner); Peter Benchley (Interviewer).

CREW: Universal Studios presents A Zanuck/Brown Production of *Jaws*. *Music:* John Williams. *Film Editor:* Verna Fields. *Director of Photography:* Bill Butler. *Screenplay:* Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb. *Based on a Novel by:* Peter Benchley. *Produced by:* Richard Zanuck and David Brown. *Directed by:* Steven Spielberg. *Production Design:* Joe Alves, Jr. *Special Effects:* Robert A. Mattey. *Production Executive:* William S. Gilmore, Jr. *Underwater Photography:* Rexford Metz. *Camera Operator:* Michael Chapman. *Sound:* John R. Canter, Robert Hoyt. *Unit Production Manager:* Jim Fargo. *First Assistant Director:* Tom Joyner. *Second Assistant Director:* Barbara Bass. *Script Supervisor:* Charlise Bryant. *Location Casting:* Shari Rhodes. *Set Decorator:* John M. Dwyer. *Technical Advisor:* Manfred Zendar. *Cosmetics:* Cinamatique. *Live Shark Footage Filmed by:* Ron and Valerie Taylor. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 120 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On Amity Island during summer, a girl named Chrissy goes for a swim after an all-night party and is promptly devoured by a great white shark.

The next morning, Amity's police chief, Brody, investigates the girl's disappearance. All too soon, her half-eaten corpse washes ashore, and the coroner rules the cause of death to be shark attack. Concerned for the safety of Amity's populace, Brody closes the beaches pending further investigation. The city elders, however, are

worried about business since July 4th is fast approaching, and closing the beaches could destroy the island community's tourist-based economy. The mayor persuades Brody to cover up the truth about the shark attack, and the coroner recants his former findings, arguing now that Chrissy's death was the result of a boating accident. The beaches stay open.

A few days later, the great white shark glides inland again, and eats a little boy frolicking in the water. Amity is thrown into chaos as the boy's grief-stricken mother offers a reward for anybody who kills the shark that murdered her son. Brody closes the beach for 24 hours, and an oceanographic expert, Hooper, is summoned to town to help hunt the offending fish. Meanwhile, a seaman, the salty Quint, offers to kill the shark for \$10,000, but Amity's Elders, still worried about money, won't ante up. Growing ever more worried, Brody researches sharks.

In another close call, the shark rips up a pier, going after a "roast" (i.e. bait) dangled by two local fishermen. Then Matt Hooper arrives, and promptly examines the remains of the shark victims even as Amity hunters take to the sea (most of them drunk...) in search of the predator. Hooper soon realizes that an abnormally large shark is on the prowl in the shallow waters near the island. When the locals kill a tiger shark and bring it inland, Hooper detects it has too small a bite radius to be their culprit.

Brody, who has a phobia about the water, and the more courageous Hooper take a boat out to sea to hunt the shark, but instead run across the wreckage of a fishing boat. All aboard are dead, the victims of a shark attack. Though Brody warns against it vehemently, the mayor of Amity orders the beaches "open" for the Independence Day weekend. July 4th comes, and the shark makes a deadly appearance, killing a boater and leaving Brody's youngest son, Michael, in shock, after a close encounter.

With few options remaining, the elders of Amity hire Quint to kill the shark. With Brody and Hooper serving as his crew, Quint ships out on his vessel, the *Orca*, to hunt the beast. Almost immediately, Quint and Hooper clash. As the days at sea pass, the crew of the *Orca* and the shark play a game of cat and mouse. The 3 ton, 25 foot long shark circles the ship, and Quint harpoons it. The *Orca*

then tracks the shark for days.

One night during the hunt, Quint tells a story about his time aboard the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*. When the ship was torpedoed during World War II, 1100 men were forced to abandon ship ... and jump into the water. Sharks ate dozens of the sailors before a rescue ship arrived. Quint survived the experience, and has never forgotten it.

Before long, the shark returns, resisting all attempts to kill it. It nearly pulls the *Orca* underwater, and the ship starts to sink. Realizing he is facing a cleverer opponent than he estimated, Quint turns the ship for home, but the motor fails and the lower deck of the boat becomes submerged. In a last ditch effort to stop the shark, Hooper goes underwater in an anti-shark metal cage, armed with a hypodermic needle. His goal is to inject the fish with poison, but the plan requires close-quarters precision. Not surprisingly, the shark destroys the cage in short order, and the mission fails. Hooper's fate is left unknown as the shark mounts a new attack on the boat.

In the final battle, the shark eats Quint, and stalks Brody. Climbing a sinking crow's nest on the *Orca*, Brody confronts the shark. Armed with a rifle, he waits for the shark to swallow a canister of compressed air. Aiming carefully, Brody detonates the canister and blows the rapidly approaching predator to smithereens. Brody is relieved to discover Hooper still alive, and the survivors swim back to Amity...

COMMENTARY: Peter Benchley's best-selling novel *Jaws* is a horror tale for grown-ups. There are adulterous sexual affairs in the town of Amity, not to mention an unspoken societal rule about the roles of "outsiders" and "islanders." In the book, Brody is not a native of the town, and is looked down on for it. And, his wife has an affair with the visiting oceanographer, Hooper. By contrast, Steven Spielberg's film adaptation of *Jaws* is a horror tale for all ages, a streamlined entertainment that discards most of Benchley's adult character interplay and elements of "class warfare" in favor of a tense essay about man's greatest fears.

The movie has simplified the popular novel to a significant degree, but remains incredibly adroit in the manner by which it exploits

heroic and mythological archetypes. The hero with the Achilles heel (Brody's fear of the ocean...), the old salt (Quint), the young buck who thinks he knows better (Hooper), and even the sea monster (the shark), all find new life under Spielberg's fresh-faced, enthusiastic approach to story-telling. Spielberg's *Jaws* is an offspring of Ernest Hemingway as much as it is of Peter Benchley.

The quality so remarkable about *Jaws*, even today, is that the scariest moments are those which suggest horror rather than depicting it outright. The late Robert Shaw (Quint) delivers one of the silver screen's great monologues near the end of *Jaws* when he shares the incredible true story of the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*. In 1945 (after delivering the atom bomb), the ship was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Eleven hundred men abandoned ship for the ocean. Within half an hour, the first shark arrived on the scene. The creatures dined on the sailors for more than a week. One hundred men died in the first day alone, and when rescue came, only 376 men (of 1100) were alive.

This story is so awful, so frightening that Spielberg knows he need do little to augment it but point his camera at a fine actor and let him attack the material. Since movies were once a communal experience (before home theaters and DVD players...), it is rewarding to watch *Jaws* with a large audience. When Quint commences his tale, the audience inevitably goes dead silent ... hypnotized by his words, and the terrifying mental picture they conjure. It is to Spielberg's everlasting credit that he didn't take the easy way out, the way a more "typical" horror director might have. Specifically, he doesn't cut to a flashback actually showing the *Indianapolis* and its beleaguered men. Instead, the audience has the opportunity to imagine the encounter, and as has been proven many times, imagination can be far more frightening than visual depiction.

Spielberg builds scares throughout *Jaws* in this restrained fashion. He has an understanding that knowledge (as well as anecdotal information) is vital in the technique of building fear. A smart audience is a prepared audience. And a prepared audience is a worried one. Accordingly, *Jaws* is jam-packed with accurate and truly frightening information about sharks. In short order, the film

reveals that most sharks attack humans within 10 feet of the shore, in less than 3 feet of water. It also provides further troubling information, about everything from shark territoriality and bite radius, to stomach contents. In one very difficult moment to watch, the film shows actual photographs of shark bite victims.

All of this information preps the audience for the confrontation to come. Viewers know what a shark can do, and know they should be scared. Spielberg provides them this information, then, like Hitchcock, ruthlessly manipulates them with it.

Of course, there's no way that a movie about shark attacks could avoid depicting the bloody encounters themselves. But, yet again, Spielberg is efficient, not showy, in laying out the blood and guts. Most of the time, the shark is not in the frame at all during the assaults. Instead, there are P.O.V. tracking shots from deep beneath the sea as a swimmer's legs or other bobbing body parts are seen swaying with a rippling ocean surface. Though legend has it that Bruce the shark perpetually malfunctioned, and that's why Spielberg didn't reveal more of his beast, the simple truth is that the horror scenes are more effective without the shark in full view. John Williams' pounding score coupled with subjective camera shots (from the shark's perspective), and the sight of swimmers jerking and being pulled under, are quite effective without resorting to close-ups of the monster's gnashing teeth. These moments leave enough to the imagination to be truly terrifying.

Conversely, the moments wherein the shark breaks the water to reveal its tooth-filled head are nothing less than adrenaline-inducing. Some people think the shark in this film looks phony. This reviewer wouldn't want to get close enough to be sure.

But, *Jaws* is much more than its accumulation of suggested (and actual) horror moments. Steven Spielberg understands how to create a sense of place, and Amity is a splendid locale to exploit. The habits of summer, the beach bum existence, the local annoyances, the local politics, and even scenes of Brody family life give the film that important quality of verisimilitude. Simply put, the film appears realistic rather than a "monster attack" fantasy of shlocky Hollywood. If Spielberg crosses the line into sentimentality anywhere (his only weakness as a filmmaker...), it is in depicting

some of the father-son dynamics of the Brodys. The restraint he reveals in the film's horror is not to be found here, and a few of the family sequences, which call out for similar underplaying, are wrung for every bit of saccharine cutes the director can find. But, that is a small flaw in a very impressive film.

If one had to describe the subplot (and driving force) of *Jaws* in four words, it would be: "it's the economy, stupid." Much of the film revolves around the town elders, and their attempt to maintain a robust tourist economy despite the danger to life and limb posed by the hungry shark grazing in Amity's waters. The mayor initiates a cover-up and Brody is actually a conspirator, at least for a time. Basically, everybody in the town is terrified of losing money: that's the real monster in Amity, not the shark. The town scenes are shrill, contentious and highly effective. Spielberg not only plumbs the depths of the ocean, he delves deeply into the local bureaucracy to reveal how decisions are made purely on the basis of money.

The corruption of the town officials is surely a reflection of the Watergate scandal and the overriding '70s belief that government could not be trusted. It just plays out in the microcosm of Amity. Brody is a good man drawn into a conspiracy of silence, and the cover-up is eventually revealed ... but not before damage has been done. The Watergate analogy is probably lighter than some critics have suggested, but it is impossible to forget that *Jaws* has a political angle: the certain and understood knowledge that life and death decisions are made on the basis of how they affect one's pocketbook. What price is too high to pay for a profitable fourth of July weekend? So many horror films have repeated *Jaws*' "the beaches must stay closed" political debate that it has now become a standard trapping of the genre, seen in *Piranha* (1978), *Grizzly* (1976) and *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977) to name just three.

Ultimately, the characteristics that make a film great go beyond any combination of acting, direction, photography, editing and music. It is a magic equation that some films get right, and some don't. *Jaws* is a classic and brilliant horror film because, in the final analysis, it works on a subconscious, mythological level. There is little doubt that the shark in the film is smarter than any animal has the right to be. It outthinks Hooper and Quint during the climactic battle, and is

one tough critter. Throughout the film there is the very understated notion that the shark is a monster beyond biology. This shark, a creature that turns and attacks when threatened, is, like Michael Myers in the *Halloween* saga, a symbol of pure evil. It isn't just hunger that drives this monster. It seems to possess a personal desire to kill Quint, Brody and Hooper. This idea doesn't overpower the film, but it is there.



Permission to come aboard? Bruce the Shark attacks the *Orca* during the climactic moments of *Jaws* (1975).

On a more basic level, viewers watching *Jaws* understand that the ocean is a realm of mystery they do not completely understand. In that sense, the shark has the home field advantage. It is comfortable, natural, and at a huge advantage, in the water. Meanwhile, man is awkward, out of place and endangered there. Beyond jolts, beyond “stinger” music, beyond well-written, evocative dialogue, *Jaws* is successful because it plays on the primeval fears of the “other,” the creature we don’t understand. That horror is doubled because the battle is waged in a territory that is also unfamiliar, dangerous, and to be feared.

Jaws is the perfect escapist entertainment, and any attempt to read too deeply into it wouldn't be fruitful. The film works because people are afraid of sharks, and because its characters are memorable ones. There is a male-bonding element to the picture with Brody and Hooper learning to love Quint, warts and all. And it is a beautiful film, with the last act set entirely on the deep blue sea. This sequence is breathtaking and frightening, and the audience is reminded that the ocean is not only a dangerous world, but a lovely, seductive one as well. From its perfectly executed and pitched opening sequence (which sees Chrissy unexpectedly yanked down and eaten by the shark in the placid ocean waters...), *Jaws* is never anything less than slick entertainment. It has more jolts than most horror movies, is populated by interesting people, has a fantastic setting, and, most importantly, a great villain. But Spielberg's restraint and understanding of suspense is what keeps it all afloat.

LEGACY: *Jaws* overtook *The Exorcist* as the horror movie phenomenon of the '70s when it was released in 1975. Like *The Exorcist*, it received mixed reviews, but audiences were wowed. As a result of his work on the film, Steven Spielberg became the most beloved and well-known director of the generation. After *Jaws*, Spielberg directed notable genre efforts including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1978), *1941* (1979), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *E.T.* (1982), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *Hook* (1991), *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *The Lost World* (1997).

As for *Jaws*, it became the tent pole of a long-lived Universal franchise that came to include *Jaws II* (1978), *Jaws 3D* (1983), and *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987). Perhaps more significantly, *Jaws* set off a second wave of "animal attacks" films, both in the water (*Orca* [1977], *Tentacles* [1977], *Tintorera—Tiger Shark* [1977], and *Devil Fish* [1984]) and out (*Grizzly* [1976]).

In 1999, sharks returned for big screen horror in the blockbuster *Deep Blue Sea*, a sort of *Jaws*-meets-*Jurassic Park*.

Legend of the Werewolf (1975) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Cushing (Professor Paul); Ron Moody (Zookeeper); Hugh Griffith (Maestro Pamponi); David Bailie (Boulon); Lynn Dalby (Christine); Stefan Gryffe (Max Gerard); Renee Houston (Chou-Chou); Norman Mitchell (Tiny); Mark Weavers (Young Etoile); Marjorie Yates (Madame Tellier); Roy Castle (Photographer); Elaine Baillie (Annabelle); John Harvey (Prefect); Patrick Holt (Dignitary); Hilary Labow (Zoe); Michael Ripper (Sewerman); David Rintoul (Etoile/the Werewolf); Pamela Green (Anne-Marie); Sue Bishop (Tania); James McManus (Emigré Husband); Jane Gussons (Emigré Wife).

CREW: A Tyburn Film Production, *Legend of the Werewolf*. *Director of Photography:* John Wilcox. *Art Director:* Jack Shampain. *Assistant Art Director:* Brian Ackland-Snow. *Film Editor:* Henry Richardson. *Sound Editor:* Roy Baker. *Production Manager:* Ron Jackson. *Special Photographic Effects:* Charles Staffell. *Assistant Director:* Peter Saunders. *Camera Operator:* Gerry Anstiss. *Continuity:* Pamela Davies. *Still Photographer:* Douglas Webb. *Sound Recordists:* John Bromnage, Ken Barker. *Production Assistant:* Lorraine Fennell. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Mary Gibson. *Make-up:* Jimmy Evans, Graham Freeborn. *Hairstylist:* Stella Rivers. *Assistant Film Editor:* Roy Helmrich. *Assistant Sound Editor:* Beverley Collings. *Construction Manager:* George Aill. *Properties:* Nick Rivers. *Grip:* George Beavis. *Gaffer:* John Tytner. *Music Composed by:* Harry Robinson. *Music Supervisor:* Phillip Martell. *Written by:* John Elder. *Produced by:* Kevin Francis. *Directed by:* Freddie Francis. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In central Europe in the 19th century, the legend arises of a human baby who is raised and cared for by a wolf pack. This

legend has basis in fact, for it is the tale of young Etoile, a boy taken by wolves on Christmas Eve and raised wild.

Etoile returns to humanity when he is a toddler, performing as a circus attraction in the ramshackle traveling organization of Maestro Pamponi. Etoile travels with the circus for many years, and becomes a strapping, handsome adult. Then one night—when the moon is full—he turns into a werewolf and murders Pamponi's assistant, Tiny.

Etoile flees the circus and ends up in Paris. There, he seeks work at a local zoo, and is employed by the drunken caretaker. He also falls in love with Christine, a prostitute at the local brothel. Christine does not tell Etoile about her profession, fearing a parochial attitude. When Etoile finds out that his beloved girl is a prostitute, he tries to kill one of her clients, the prefect! The incident is forgotten in short order, since the prefect desires no publicity or scandal, but Etoile's actions have humiliated Christine. When he asks her to marry him, she rejects him. As if in response, Etoile turns into a werewolf and goes on a killing rampage—murdering three of Christine's would-be clients.

The town coroner, the brilliant Professor Paul, suspects a loose wolf is responsible for the deaths in Paris, and visits the zoo to investigate. The trail of victims leads him to the brothel, and finally to Christine. Meanwhile, the prefect orders all wolves in the city destroyed. Etoile resists the idea, but is forced to kill his brethren in the zoo. That night, enraged again, Etoile becomes a wolf man and kills by (full) moonlight.

Professor Paul learns from a surviving victim that his attacker was neither wolf nor man, but a horrid combination of both. Equipped with books on the subject of lycanthropy, Paul sets out to capture the man-beast. He contacts Christine again, and realizes that Etoile is the monster he seeks. Paul determines that the werewolf is using the sewers beneath Paris to escape detection, and arms himself with silver bullets. He faces down Etoile, seeking to help him, but the police arrive and shatter the peace. Etoile is shot in the back. Dying, he flees to Christine and dies at her feet while the murderous authorities and the saddened Professor Paul look on.

COMMENTARY: By 1975, the werewolf film had been done to death. Yet Tyburn's *Legend of the Werewolf* is a good little unassuming film on the subject. Better than the company's previous effort (1974's *The Ghoul*), this story of a boy-turned-werewolf benefits from a gritty, interesting setting, and another stand-out performance by that perennial of '70s horror cinema, Peter Cushing.

Often, the setting of a film makes all the difference. *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) is a prime example of an old story re-done in a fresh setting. *Legend of the Werewolf* demands attention by setting its story among the colorful underclass of 19th century Paris. This is a world of drunks, orphans, prostitutes and scheming politicians, and the film does not shy away from an unromantic view of one of the world's most notoriously romantic cities. The heroine of the film is Christine, an orphan. She is so desperate for wealth that she has become a prostitute. She won't marry Etoile, not because her feelings don't support the idea of marriage, but because "he's got nothing." She desires a better life and will not settle for less, and the film is unflinching in its depiction of her as a desperate social climber.

In fact, the movie is filled with unsavory men and women. There's the brothel with an unscrupulous madam, the nasty showman who treats his living human attractions like cattle, and the drunken zookeeper. Then there's the scandal-plagued prefect, looking to preserve his reputation. With these examples in mind, the people of Paris are depicted as pretty terrible all the way around, and that's an interesting conceit. Etoile kills many of these thoroughly rotten human beings, but the audience's sympathy remains squarely with him. He does not like his lot in life, not only that he is a werewolf, but that he is exploited by men of all creeds, and kept apart from the woman he loves by the social construct of wealth. Etoile is the outsider not just because he is a monster, but because he is poor, and the movie is really about a man railing against his social class. Lycanthropy is just the tool that gives his protest teeth (or fangs.)

If there is a noble character in this film, it is (not surprisingly) Peter Cushing's coroner, Paul. As usual, Cushing is able to marshal audience identification with a minimum of fuss. Purely by his sparkling intelligence and sincerity, he comes across as sharp and

insightful. Those qualities make him very different from the other denizens of Paris, and there's a bit of Van Helsing's sharp intellect in Cushing's depiction of this professional. About half way through *Legend of the Werewolf*, the film goes from being Etoile's personal story of revenge to a police procedural, and Cushing takes the lead role. In the best tradition of horror protagonists, Cushing shows compassion for his enemy, wishing to learn from it rather than simply destroying it. "You fools!" he shouts at the police, "Blundering idiots! Must you always kill?" Cushing's concern for his prey not only makes sense for a man of science, it reinforces the idea that the people of Paris are primitive, lustful people with base appetites that include, even, murder.

Legend of the Werewolf features some gory murders, great werewolf make-up, and plenty of red-hued "werewolf cam" tracking shots. And with Cushing leading the investigation, the film has a fine horror backbone. Yet on top of all the horror is the story of a boy raised in the wild, and unable to integrate into a human society that has set limits on people of his "breeding." Etoile is a pathetic character, but one who desires what we all desire: to love, and to, ultimately, amount to something. The very rules of Parisian life keep those things from Etoile, and when he strikes back, he is striking back not because he is a monster, but because society is.

***Lisa and the Devil* (released in America as *House of Exorcism* in 1975) * ***

Critical Reception

"It's fairly incomprehensible in places, but quite moody, and has some interesting things to say about alienation and self-exploration. Bava's clever direction somewhat compensates for rather poor performances from the two leads."—Anthony Tomlinson, *Shivers* #30, June 1996, page 27.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Telly Savalas (Lehare); Elke Sommer (Lisa); Silva Koscina (Sophia); Alessio Orano (Maximilian).

WITH: Gabriele Tinti, Kathy Leone, Eduardo Fajardo, Franz Von Treuberg, Espartaco Santoni, Alida Valli.

CREW: Alfred Leone Presents *Lisa and the Devil*.
Screenplay by: Mario Bava and Alfred Leone. *Music by:* Carlo Savina. *Directed by:* Mario Bava. *Produced by:* Alfred Leone. *Director of Photography:* Cecilio Paniagua. *Film Editor:* Carlo Reali. *Production Manager:* Fausto Lupi. *Art Director:* Nedo Azzini. *Assistant Director:* Lamberto Bava. *Cameraman:* Emilio Varriano. *Assistant Camera:* Gianni Medica. *Make-up:* Franco Freda. *Hairdresser:* Gisa Favella. *Special Effects:* Franco Tocci. *Color:* Technicolor. A Leone International Film. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R.
Running Time: 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A woman named Lisa visits a church and sees a fresco that depicts Satan carrying off the damned. Not long after, she spots a real-life, dead-ringer for Satan in a nearby antique store. When Lisa becomes lost, the satanic-looking man, a butler named Lehare, gives her directions. Mysteriously, Lehare seems to be carrying a corpse, or a mannequin, oddly mirroring the ghoulish work of art. Lisa thinks this odd, but not as odd as when she later runs into that corpse, apparently alive and well. His name is Carlos, and he claims to be Lisa's lover, though he calls her by the name "Elena." Baffled, Lisa pushes Carlos down a flight of stairs, killing him.

Attempting to escape the scene, Lisa hitches a ride with the wealthy Sophia, Sophia's husband, and her lover and chauffeur, George. They drive away, but that night their car breaks down at the palatial house where Lehare tends to an old blind woman and her son, Maximilian. Almost immediately, Maximilian calls Lisa "Elena," and tells her that things will be different "this time," that he will not let their love die. What follows is a bizarre night of horrors, as Lisa has encounter after encounter with Carlos, sometimes living, sometimes dead, and an unknown assailant murders the guests beginning with George. And, all through it all, Lehare seems to be enjoying himself.

When Francis and Sophia die, Lisa attempts to flee the house, learns

that Carlos is actually Maximilian's stepfather, and that both men were in love with her Doppelgänger, Elena. Worse, Maximilian is apparently a murderous psychotic who has killed George and Sophia and who keeps Elena's corpse in his bed! Maximilian knocks Lisa out, and makes love to her while she is unconscious. Then he plans a strange wedding ceremony. When his mother objects, Maximilian kills her too. Then, the corpses seem to come to life, and Maximilian falls out a window to his death. Actually, it was Lehare, manipulating the corpses to add one more dead soul to his list.

Lisa awakens from her stupor and leaves the mansion. Neighborhood children see her, and are terrified. They think she's a ghost because no one has lived in the old house for a hundred years. Desperate to escape the nightmare, Lisa boards a plane. But, in mid-air, Lisa is terrified to see all the corpses of days past lined up in the passenger section. She seeks help from the pilot, but flying the plane ... straight to Hell, apparently ... is Lehare/Satan. Terrified, Lisa dies, and reverts to her true self: Elena.

COMMENTARY: Echoing the sentiments of viewers forced to endure this film, Elke Sommer breathlessly declares in *Lisa and the Devil* that she doesn't "want to spend the rest of her life in this nightmare." That's one line that a more self-aware film may have studiously avoided, but *Lisa and the Devil* is a strange movie just as likely to state the obvious as it is to offer no explanation for a peculiar going-on. It's a truly baffling film, apparently the phantasm of a woman who is already dead (but doesn't realize it). Things happen (or don't happen) in the movie for little rhyme or reason, and the viewer is left in dire need of a scoring card. Who is that old woman mother to? Who killed whom? Who is really dead? Anyone seeking such answers is bound to walk away from *Lisa and the Devil* disappointed. It isn't linear.

On one hand, some critics might praise *Lisa and the Devil* for attempting to represent a nightmare on celluloid. The film does seem structured as a dream, and that is a daring way to create a movie, a fascinating strategy even. But it is also highly confounding. Nightmares are generally unpleasant experiences, not something most people care to endure. But, like a bizarre dream played out on

the screen, *Lisa and the Devil* shares a funny understanding of time, blends identities with a vengeance, and is filled with symbols ... some easily comprehensible and some not.

Any director worth his union card could have helmed a straightforward movie with these same ingredients: five guests in an old dark house; a man who may be the devil; a blind homeowner; a mysterious past; and a question of identity. Yet Bava blends these plot elements in a unique, if wholly oddball fashion. Some of the visuals remain striking to contemplate twenty years later: a corpse framed behind a wedding cake, Telly Savalas strong-arming corpses that may be dummies, and so forth. And, there's a strong sexual undercurrent to the story as well (culminating in a sick, if rather erotic, rape). Even the gothic touches (such as Lisa running in slow-motion photography through a Victorian garden) are welcome and unexpected. Yet, in the final analysis, a film is supposed to represent more than the sum of its parts. It should convey some meaning beyond mood. Bava's got the mood down pat, but not the plot, and that's a problem for this reviewer. Bava knows how he wants the audience to feel, he knows how to generate those feelings, but he isn't capable of putting them in a cohesive pattern in *Lisa and the Devil*. At least not as effectively as he did in *Hatchet for a Honeymoon* (1971), which also concerned a psychotic's obsession with the wedding bed.

Still, it should be noted that many fans and admirers of Bava's work consider *Lisa and the Devil* a masterpiece. The film was corrupted into *House of Exorcism* for the 1975 release (with Robert Alda as an exorcising priest...), but this viewer saw the re-mastered original and was, frankly, mystified. The film is beautiful in so many ways, a gorgeous tapestry on which to paint a depiction of terrifying dreams, but the film needs a bit more plot to go with the mood. There is a funny 1970s joke in the film, however. At one point, Telly Savalas offers Sommer a lollipop, referencing his popular *Kojak* persona. That's the only moment of fun in a very serious, very ponderous, and very confusing horror film.

***Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“...a diaphanous horror story, firmly situated in a time and place, shrewdly observed and knowingly acted.... Weir’s movie is permeated with suppressed eroticism that never crudely surfaces. By lyric touches and the art of indirection he conveys the somewhat smelly radiance that emanates from the girlish admixture of innocent crush and diffused smut, which constitutes the eternal milieu of adolescents segregated from the other sex.”—Vernon Young, *The Film Criticism of Vernon Young* (edited by Bert Cardullo), University Press of America, 1990, 288–289.

“...as a tantalizing puzzle, a tease, a suggestion of a forbidden answer just out of earshot, it works hypnotically and very nicely indeed....”—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert’s Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 498.

“Peter Weir gives us a strong notion of what it is for these characters to be in an aboriginal and empty country populated by myths of ancient potency which are unknown to the present inhabitants.... [This film’s] antecedents are in literature: not only in Henry James but also in the eighteenth century gothic writers.... One can afford to leave aside the occasional obscurantism and doominess of the surface of the film: its essence is thoughtful.”—Penelope Gilliatt, *New Yorker*, April 23, 1979, page 122.

“Ultimately, the mystery is never solved, which is dramatically frustrating but thematically valid.... Weir’s film is not about the solution of mysteries; it is about how the human mind copes with events that it cannot categorize according to known reality ... the film’s strength is that it is not reducible to a single explanation, even a valid one; other explanations are equally valid ... the film is often mesmerizing.”—Steve Biodrowski, *Cinefantastique*,

Volume 30, #7/8: "Picnic at Hanging Rock;
Mysteries Beyond Human Ken," October 1998, page
121.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Rachel Roberts (Mrs. Appleyard); Dominic Guard (Michael Fitzhubert); Helen Morse (Mlle de Portiers); Jacki Weaver (Minnie); Anne Lambert (Miranda); Karen Robson (Irma); Christine Schuler (Edith); Margaret Nelson (Sara); Jane Vallis (Marion); Vivean Gray (Miss McGraw); Kirsty Child (Miss Lumley); Frank Gunnell (Mr. Whitehead); Ingrid Mason (Rosamund); Jenny Lovell (Blanche); Janet Murray (Juliana); Wyn Roberts (Sgt. Bumper); Kay Taylor (Mrs. Bumper); Garry McDonald (Constable Jones); Martin Vaughan (Ben Hussey); Jack Fegan (Doc MacKenzie); Peter Collingwood (Colonel Fitzhubert); Olga Dickie (Mrs. Fitzhubert); John Jarrett (Albert Camdall); With: Vivienne Grantee, Angela Bengini, Melinda Cardwell, Annabel Powriek, Amanda White, Lindy O'Connell, Verity Smith, Deborah Mullins, Sue Jamieson, Bernadette Bengini, Barbara Lloyd.

CREW: A Janus Film Production. B.E.F. Film Distributors Pty. Ltd. with the South Australian Film Corporation and the Australian Film Commission Present a McElroy and McElroy Production. Produced in association with Patricia Lovell. Peter Weir's film of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. *Screenplay:* Cliff Green. *From a Novel by:* Joan Lindsay. *Flute de Pan played by:* Gheorge Zamfir. *Additional Original Music:* Bruce Smeaton. *Art Director:* David Copping. *Director of Photography:* Russell Boyd. *Editor:* Max Lemon. *Executive Producer:* John Graves, Patricia Lovell. *Produced by:* Hal McElroy and Jim McElroy. *Directed by:* Peter Weir. *Camera Operator:* John Seale. *Nature Photographer:* David Sanderson. *Sound Recordist:*

Don Connelly. *Dubbing Editor*: Greg Bell. *Artistic Advisor to Director*: Martin Sharp. *First Assistant Director*: Mark Egerton. *Second Assistant Director*: Kim Dalton. *Script Consultant*: Sidney Stebel. *Continuity*: Gilda Baracchi. *Casting*: M&L Casting Consultants. *Production Assistant*: Steve Knapman. *Wardrobe Designer*: Judy Dorsman. *Wardrobe Assistants*: Wendy Stites, Mandy Smith. *Make-up Supervisor*: Joe Perez. *Property Buyer and Set Dresser*: Graham Walker. *Property Master*: Monte Fieguth. *Assistant to Art Director*: Chris Webster. *Assistant to Art Department*: Neil Anguvin. *Titles and Optical*: Optical and Graphic. *Assistant Film Editor*: Andre Fleurch. *Negative Matching*: Margaret Cardin. *Sound Mix*: United Sound. *Lab*: Colorfilm (Australia) Pty. Ltd. *Photographed in*: Eastmancolor. *Camera and Lenses*: Panavision. Made on location at Hanging Rock, Victoria, Stathalbyn and Clare, Marbury School, South Australia, and South Australia Film Corporation Studios. Picnic Productions Pty. Ltd, 1975. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 120 minutes.

P.O.V.

“On Saturday the 14th of February 1900, a party of schoolgirls from Appleyard College picnicked at Hanging Rock near Mt. Macedon in the state of Victoria. During the afternoon several members of the party disappeared without a trace....”—opening card of Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975).

“There’s no documentary evidence whatsoever. We can’t even determine whether the girls ever disappeared.... Of course, ever since the country was settled, there have been stories of people disappearing, to this very day. I think that quite likely (author Joan Lindsay) is referring to a true incident, not exactly as described.... I think people disappear for a variety of reasons.... I liked the idea

of there being no solution, as there isn't to most things²⁵.—Peter Weir, describing the “true” nature of the story depicted in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

SYNOPSIS: On Valentine's Day, 1900, the girls at Appleyard College in remotest Australia prepare for an afternoon outdoors at scenic Hanging Rock. After a stern lecture from Miss Appleyard, the girls are on their way but for Sara Wayborn, who has been forced to remain at the school because she is behind in her work.

After a brief carriage ride, the girls and their caretakers, including the gruff Miss McGraw, examine the beautiful Hanging Rock, a volcanic upcropping of stone millions of years old. The beautiful Miranda decides to lead an expedition up the stone face, taking three other girls with her, including Irma, and the fat complainer, Edith. They climb steadily for a time, briefly watched by two attentive boys, but then grow tired. The four girls sleep for a time and then awaken mysteriously—*as if in a trance*—and continue up the high ridge of the mountain. Edith fails to join the others, spies a strange red cloud overhead, and races down to tell adults. On the way down, she sees Miss McGraw, who, for some reason, has removed her skirt, climbing the rock in a hypnotic state too.

At Appleyard College, it is 10:30 P.M., and no one has returned from the picnic. Then the group returns, minus Miranda, the two other girls, and Miss McGraw. Edith is in a state of shock, screaming bloody murder. The next morning, the local constable leads a search team on Hanging Rock, but the girls and McGraw have vanished. The two boys are briefly held under suspicion of foul play, and the police resort to using bloodhounds. Again, the search turns up nothing.

One of the boys, an English fellow named Michael, finds himself dreaming of Miranda. He returns to Hanging Rock, feels the lure of the mountain, and climbs to its peak. He too is overcome, but not before finding a scrap of a beautiful white dress, perhaps belonging to Miranda. Michael's friend, an Australian orphan, finds Michael and Irma, but Irma remembers nothing of what happened to her friends or teacher.

The story of the disappearances at Hanging Rock becomes world

news, and parents rapidly withdraw their daughters from Appleyard College. Mrs. Appleyard seeks solace in the bottle, and is forced to expel Sara Wayborn when her guardian fails to pay for her tuition.

Time passes and the mystery of Hanging Rock deepens, haunting everyone in the area. On the day she is expelled, Sara commits suicide. Desperate and saddened, Mrs. Appleyard visits Hanging Rock. A day later, her dead body is found at the foot of the mountain. And the mystery continues...

COMMENTARY: Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is the story of a mystery that deepens and grows until it becomes, for its participants and the audience alike, nothing less than an obsession. A horror film that plays like an art film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is the thoroughly unsettling story of a group of girls who climb a mountain ... and then disappear off the face of the Earth for all time.

Every mystery has its own unique taste. When the plane called *Stardust* disappeared in the skies of South America in the late 1940s, there were tantalizing and contradictory clues. The pilot sent a transmission with one word "*stendec*" just before the plane disappeared forever. That cryptic final message suggested the plane was only four minutes from landing, when in fact pieces of the plane were found over fifty miles away from the landing strip. What happened? What did these details mean? Today, there are some answers to these questions, but the details remain tantalizing, and sometimes contradictory. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* likewise constructs a clever story around a similarly bizarre disappearance, one in which the details are nothing less than mesmerizing.

Prime among these clues is the role of Miranda, a beautiful girl, who, for whatever reason, disappears on that ancient rock. The film opens with Miranda's enigmatic comment that she "won't be" at the school "much longer." Is this merely a reference to the fact that she is considering a transfer, or could something deeper be read into her remark? Is she, in fact, aware of what is to become of her on that strange rock? Later, she wonders aloud if "we as humans perform some function unknown to us." This comment likewise suggests a kind of special insight or knowledge. Whatever happened to Miranda on that picnic, awareness of it was dawning within her

before she ever left the school.

Even the others note this strange sort of supernatural knowledge. Sarah, the friend Miranda leaves behind, notes that “Miranda knows things a lot of other people don’t know. *Secrets*. She knew she wouldn’t be coming back.” This too is an indication of Miranda’s special status as “different.” But the question remains, how different? Could Miranda’s remarks have been innocuous ones, meaning nothing? Or are they critical to an understanding of what occurs at Hanging Rock? The film offers no respite from those questions, but one cannot help but ask them.

Miranda is the film’s most interesting character, and Weir depicts her in sensual terms. She is often seen in loving slow-motion photography, and in fawning close-ups. We see her brushing her long silky hair, or removing a stocking with a delicate grace. She is an image of beauty, but innocence too. If awareness of her fate is dawning in Miranda, then so is knowledge of something else: an understanding of her powers as a woman. It is no secret that the boys of the film lust after Miranda (as does Sara...), and so the film revels in the moments when Miranda pauses to remove a black stocking (in close-up) or release her hand from the confining prison of white gloves. These scenes indicate that life itself may be obsessed with Miranda, that perhaps Hanging Rock shared the boys’ lust for the girl and carried her off to have her for itself. Or did the boys’ lust for the girls somehow result in their disappearance?

The rock itself is an important character in the film. It has existed for a million years (or as one girl claims “has been waiting a million years just for us...”). Weir stages several shots from the inner crevices of the rock, essentially shooting a P.O.V. from the stone mountain—as though the camera were gazing out on those who crawl across the rock’s outer “skin,” insects perhaps.

The rock is also representative, perhaps, of competing philosophies at work in the Australia of 1900. On one hand is the aborigine “pagan” religion that allows for magic, and on the other hand is the more restrained and refined tenets of Christianity (embodied by the Appleyard School). These two worlds clash at the rock, a geological marvel that has many secrets to tell ... yet remains silent. That the rock is otherworldly or at the least, mysterious, is also borne out in

the film's dialogue and settings. One character on the picnic notes that her watch has stopped, and wonders if something magnetic is the cause. In another strange moment, one section of rock very much resembles a human face.

The preponderance of high angle views, looking down on the girls as they make their trek to the top of the mountain, also portend that something terrible will happen when they reach the apex. It is no surprise that when the girls first enter the park with the mountain, their horses rear and all the birds fly from the trees. Something strange and evil exists there, and the animals have detected the danger.

And what of eyewitness testimony that "a red cloud" descended on the girls before they disappeared? Is that merely the hallucination of a girl suffering heat stroke? Or is it representative of something more? And why was one woman (a teacher) found undressed on the mountain? Was she raped, attacked, or merely out of her mind, breaking out of the Appleyard atmosphere of repression? Like the details of the *Stardust* mystery, these are tantalizing questions about a story with no satisfactory answers. They could be debated forever.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is a brilliant film because it can support so many interpretations. The central mystery is compelling, and every new answer only raises more questions. Is Miranda responsible for her own disappearance? Is the great rock actually a living entity? Is this really just a conventional kidnapping, but one where we never meet the perpetrators? Or is it just a stupid accident? Have the girls merely fallen down a hole, never to be found? Who knows for sure?

One thing is certain, Peter Weir understands that a basic element of human life is uncertainty. In this existence we humans share, we don't always get the answers we want, for whatever reason. We don't always know why planes crash, or why loved ones should die suddenly of heart attacks ... even though they appear healthy. The point is the uncertainty: it's the essence of who we are.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is a meditation on that uncertainty. In this author's opinion, the horror film rises to its apex of quality when it plays on the fact that humans don't really control their universe. In *The Blair Witch Project*, the audience never saw the "witch," and was

never even certain if there was such a creature. Instead, the film just offered tantalizing possibilities. That same could be written about the TV series *Space: 1999*, whose central thesis was that space was a realm of mystery, and that man was not yet knowledgeable enough to be certain about all of its laws and properties. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is comparable to these productions because it sets up a mystery, offers some bizarre clues, but finally makes no determination on what “really happened.”

A running theme throughout *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is not only the battle between Christianity and paganism, but between civilization and nature. The film opens with several shots of the mountainous rock, set to the flute of Pan. This wild music is mischievous and emotional, quite a contrast to the “refined” behavior of the girls, who live by rigid school schedules and societal rules (which dictate how they dress, how they wear their hair, how they frame their words, et cetera). When unleashed into the world of Pan, the world of unfettered nature, these “restricted” girls promptly disappear, a victim of nature’s chaos.

Weir stages several shots of ants, spiders and other wildlife roaming nature, going about their business, and there seems to be a comparison to man. As the disappearance asserts, man knows no more about the true nature of his world than these creatures do. Next to the rock—an eternal—man is just as small as a lizard or a koala or a spider. The girls’ ordered existence cannot compete with nature’s raw power. Though *Picnic at Hanging Rock* features many beautiful shots (such as a swan gliding on a golden lake), these shots only reinforce the lure: man believes nature is beautiful and harmless, but it may be malevolent. It may take three girls on a whim, and never return them.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is not a jolt ’em, blood-and-guts horror film by any definition. It represents a much more cerebral and sedate brand of terror, but one that stays with the viewer for a long time. It tells of an enigma that can never be solved, and how the loss of that doomed expedition shattered the civilized world around the rock. Unable to confront what has happened, Mrs. Appleyard becomes an alcoholic. The confrontation with nature has scared these people because they realize they have interfaced with

something that can never adequately be explained or understood.

There are so many readings possible in this film. This author knows fans that insist the film is Lovecraftian because it suggests a dark reality co-existing with our own. This author wouldn't go that far, but it's interesting to contemplate. There is simply no evidence in the film of one answer or another, but the possibilities are endless. And that makes a fascinating and beautiful film about the human condition. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Peter Weir has given the genre one of its most sensual and beautiful masterpieces, while not giving the horrific elements short shrift. This is a film that is haunting in the truest sense of the word and the mystery of *Picnic Rock* is one that lingers. One feels drawn to see the film again and again, to look for answers, to uncover clues, to impose order on a disordered world. In encouraging his viewers to take this hypnotic journey, Weir is, ironically, asking them to confront the deepest and most frightening aspects of human nature. Uncertainty is a bitch.

***Race with the Devil (1975)* * * ***

Critical Reception

“...a ridiculous mish-mash of a movie for people who never grew up ... one would think that Mr. Fonda and Mr. Oates had better things to do, but perhaps not.”—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, July 10, 1975.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Peter Fonda (Roger); Warren Oates (Frank Stewart); Loretta Swit (Alice Stewart); Lara Parker (Kelly); R.G. Armstrong (Sheriff Taylor); Clay Tanner (Delbert); Carol Blodgett (Ethel Henderson); Phil Hoover (Mechanic); Ricci Ware (Himself); Paul A. Partoin (Cal Mathers); James N. Harrell (Gun Shop Owner); Karen Miller (Kay); Arkey Blue (Himself); Jack Starrett (Gas Station Attendant); Wes Bishop (Deputy Dave).

CREW: 20th Century–Fox Presents a Saber-Maslansky Production, *Race with the Devil*.
Production Supervisor: Tony Wade. *Supervising Film Editor:* Allan Jacobs. *Music:* Leonard Rosenman.
Director of Photography: Robert Jessup. *Producer:* Wes Bishop. *Executive Producer:* Paul Maslansky.
Written by: Lee Frost and Wes Bishop. *Directed by:* Jack Starrett. *Unit Production Manager and Assistant Director:* Fred Brost. *Second Assistant Director:* Steve Lim. *Film Editor:* John Link. *Assistant Film Editor:* Michael Cipriano. *Production Mixer:* William Randall. *Re-Recording Mixer:* Don Bossman. *Script Supervisor:* Joyce King. *Property Master:* Mark Wade. *Wardrobe:* Nancy McArdle. *Make-up:* Dottie Pearl. *Stunt Coordinator:* Paul Knuckles. *Camera Operator:* George Billiet. *Special Effects:* Richard Helmer. *Main Title Design:* Jack Cole/N. Lee Lacy and Associates. *Filmed in:* Panavision with *Color by:* Deluxe. A Saber Maslansky Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.
Running Time: 88 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Motorcycle designer Frank Stewart and professional bike racer Roger, along with their two wives (Alice and Kelly), embark on a vacation in a brand new, fully-equipped recreational vehicle. Frank is not thrilled that Ginger, Kelly's pet dog, has come along too, but he copes. After a bit of driving, the girls get tired and Frank, excited about the RV's self-sufficiency, takes them off-road into a wild, but beautiful region of Texas. The two men take their motorcycles off the back of the RV for a spin, while the girls walk Ginger. The foursome then spends the night in the woods, despite the dog's agitation about something out in the night.

As midnight comes, and Roger and Frank drink the night away, they see a bonfire near a lone, gnarled tree, far across a river. They hear chanting, and see cloaked figures dancing around a fire. They linger to spy on the strangers during a naked, ceremonial dance, and then see a virgin murdered in ritualistic fashion. Unfortunately, Frank and Roger are caught spying when Alice turns on the overpowering nightlights of the RV.

Roger and Frank pack up and flee in the RV with the girls, but the angry ritual-goers attack, jumping on the RV and smashing windows. Roger beats them back after a considerable battle.

The next morning, the vacationers go to the police. They meet Sheriff Taylor, who tells them they need to go back to the exact spot where the murder occurred. The girls remain in town while the men join the police and find remnants of the bonfire in daylight. Alice and Kelly find a threatening note pinned to a window on the RV. The hieroglyphs are indecipherable, so they go to a library to translate them. They soon come to realize that the boys witnessed a black mass.

Roger and Frank return, upset with the police for not doing anything substantive about the murder. They get their RV repaired by a local mechanic, drive a bit and then stop for the night in a campground. There, Kelly feels like the locals are watching them and tells Roger she wants to go home. They go out for dinner at a restaurant and meet up with the Hendersons, a couple staying at the same motor lodge.

When they return to the RV, they find Ginger dead ... hanged from the RV's side door. The vacationers flee the motor lodge and drive far away. After quite some time, the foursome discover that poisonous snakes have been planted all through the RV. Frank crashes the RV as the serpents attack, and Roger and Frank dispatch the snakes with great difficulty. At this point, Frank and Roger search the vehicle for any further dangers and lock up for the night.

The next morning, Roger buries Ginger as Frank repairs the vehicle. Their motorcycles are ruined. Worried, they go to a local store to purchase a shotgun and then resume their journey. Unfortunately, the Satanists are not about to give up. A group of vehicles attempt to crash into the RV on the highway, boxing the RV in and ramming into it with lethal force. Frank disables one car with a gunshot, but now the race is on. Trying to escape, Frank drives the RV into an accident zone—actually another ruse by the Satanists. A group of angry cultists jump onto the RV, boarding it while it is in motion. A battle royal occurs as Frank, Roger, Alice and Kelly repel the invaders.

The foursome survive the attack. They are only 82 miles from Amarillo and safety. They pull over while there's still light to tend to the RV's damage, but relief turns to horror as the vehicle is surrounded by a circle of flames and a coven of demon worshippers...

COMMENTARY: Fouled only by a cop-out, unjustified nihilistic ending, *Race with the Devil* is a souped-up horror vehicle in love with the idea of speed. The emphasis is clearly on the "race" aspect of the title (rather than the "Devil" portion), and that is just fine. For this is a movie that moves, generating audience adrenaline via speed, stunts, action and demolition. In toto *Race with the Devil* is 90 hair-raising minutes of cars and motorcycles jumping, dodging, weaving, colliding, rolling and jockeying for superiority on the open road. The movie's visual *modus operandi* is perfectly in tune for such a purpose: the camera frequently adopts a low angle (granting perspective of the terrain ahead and behind) or is positioned on the racing vehicles themselves (thus capturing a feel of motion and distance). Director Jack Starrett manages these technical moves in masterful fashion, and his visual (and vehicular) prowess generates one of the best and most confident chase films this side of George Miller's incredible *The Road Warrior* (1982). Here, as in that classic, daredevil men leap (in mid race) from vehicle to speeding vehicle, automobiles tumble and explode, and jeopardized protagonists dangle and swing dangerously atop their chariots, clinging for life in rousing, exciting moments.

A demolition derby of near-perfect pitch and pace, *Race with the Devil* pauses between stunts long enough for Starrett to enunciate the deeper themes of the film, specifically the issue of self-sufficiency and what that term actually means in contemporary America. Much of the early portion of the film concerns itself exclusively with the sturdiness and "reliability" of Frank Stewart's new baby, his magnificent RV. This mega-vehicle comes fully loaded with a bathroom and shower, microwave oven, refrigerator, bar, color TV and stereo, thus providing all the luxuries of home while its riders are away on the road. Yet, importantly, none of these so-called luxuries or advances is particularly helpful to the hunted tourists, who find that being self-sufficient is isolating rather than comforting. They (erroneously) believe that any place they

park is “home” because the RV represents a shelter, a sanctuary. Contrarily, however, their home on wheels merely targets them as different, and isolates them from the locals.

Instead of displaying caution, for instance, Roger and Frank blunder arrogantly into the secret (satanic!) practices of the locales. Were they not buttressed by a (false) confidence that they brought the safety of home with them, they may not have so blindly stumbled into danger. All the RV really does is provide an overblown feeling of security. This is especially dangerous when push comes to shove (as it inevitably does in horror films...), because the RV, no matter how comfortable, is just an assemblage of parts ... parts that will need to be serviced or repaired. It is made up of flat tires, broken headlights and the like. And, because it is large and unwieldy, the RV is not only more difficult to navigate in road combat, it is slower moving than its opponent vehicles, which hound it across Texas like sharks attacking a whale. Self-sufficient? That is a delusion, as the movie points out, since Frank’s vehicle still requires gas and a pavement on which to race, and most importantly, a driver who can responsibly handle the wheel.

Like Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Race with the Devil* reveals the folly of attempting to bring civilization to the wild. First, the wild does not appreciate the gesture, and secondly, modern luxuries (like RVs) provide only the impression of security, not the fact, and thus grant characters a false sense of confidence.

This material is played in compelling fashion, and the choice of Peter Fonda as the film’s lead is especially thought-provoking. As Captain America in *Easy Rider* (1969), Fonda represented and spoke for the American counter-culture. The motorcycle reflected his character’s transient, unstable, non-traditional life. There was room only for one (not a family!) on a motorcycle, and the choice of transport offered no modern amenities (not even air-conditioning...).

Yet scarcely a half-decade later, Peter Fonda returned to the silver screen piloting an RV, the very symbol of a fat, decadent American suburbia. This surprise trade-in seems representative of something worthy of mention: the maturation process of the 1960s hippie generation into the very thirtysomethings they had vowed not to

trust. The aging hippies, like the generation before, were being reined in, seduced by the American middle-class dream of wealth, suburbia, hearth and home. This process was continued in the eighties with former hippies forsaking their earlier values, becoming yuppies instead.

Though it is debatable whether Fonda's presence intentionally reflects the theme, the casting works for the movie's ethos regardless. Fonda, manning an RV instead of a hog, must surely represent a powerful value shift in mainstream contemporary society. In the 1970s, the battles of the sixties were starting to be questioned, hippies were beginning families and buying homes for the first time, and making the very change seen here. Motorcycles were out; family cars were in. So either intentionally or unintentionally, *Race with the Devil* charts a generation's coming of age at the same time the movie expresses a lack of confidence in the same generation's new vehicle of choice. Does it represent a sell-out?

Race with the Devil also reflects the paranoia of a post-Watergate America. Fonda and his friends become mired in a satanic conspiracy stretching across Texas (it's always Texas, isn't it?). This cabal of evil claims members from librarians and policemen to the government itself. The point is probably twofold. On one hand, the conspiracy and fear that "everyone is against you" reflects the fear that our lives are not in our control and that a secret agenda may be working against our best interests. Another reading, perhaps more appropriate to the text of the film, relates again to that RV. When dwelling in self-sufficient luxury, there is no need to come out and meet your neighbor. Thus everyone you meet is a stranger to you ... and under suspicion. In *Race with the Devil*, what is unknown is also frightening. The local yokels wearing the cowboy hats in that country-western bar seem menacing to us (as they do to the protagonists), because they look and sound different from us, and from our ivory tower (the RV), we have no experience or comfort with their ways or customs.

There is a great deal of unique, thoughtful material in *Race with the Devil*, particularly the briefly touched on notion that in an age without religious conviction, the occult will flourish. Still, much of

the good will generated by the film is undercut by a hasty, ill-considered climax. The finale, in which the parked RV is surrounded by the Satanists in a ring of fire, looks suspiciously as though the production ran out of time or money (or both). As they realize they are trapped, the four protagonists (Swit, Parker, Fonda and Oates), are seen reacting to the (off-screen) threat in slow motion photography. The problem is that their responses do not seem to fit the particular moment in the film, and appear to be lifted from earlier tense moments in the picture. So, technically at least, the ending is weak.

Secondly, the ending feels wrong on narrative and emotional grounds. So many horror films of the 1970s end on a down-note, but this should not have been one of them. The film was artfully set up as a race between good and evil, and these four characters had done nothing wrong—not even bickered with one another à la *Night of the Living Dead*—to deserve such a rotten end. So *Race with the Devil* is a movie that nicely blends an interesting thesis about luxury and isolation with rampant paranoia and well-conceived action stunts. It seems a shame to end such an entertaining accomplishment on a tone of despair, and the downbeat ending retroactively casts a pall on the remainder of this effective thriller.

The Reincarnation of Peter Proud

Cast & Crew

CAST: Michael Sarrazin (Peter Proud); Jennifer O'Neill (Ann Curtis); Margot Kidder (Marcia Curtis); Cornelia Sharpe (Nora); Paul Hecht (Dr. Goodman); Tony Stephano (Jeff); Norman Burton (Dr. Spear).

CREW: *Directed by:* J. Lee Thompson. *Written by:* Max Ehrlich. *Director of Photography:* Victor J. Kemper. *Film Editor:* Michael Anderson. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Produced by:* Frank P. Rosenberg. A Cinerama Release, distributed by American International Pictures. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 104 minutes.

DETAILS: Previous lives and reincarnation are the subject matter of *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud*. The titular hero, a college professor, starts having disturbing dreams about events only foggily remembered. His quest takes him across the United States to a small town, where a horrible crime of passion was committed some thirty five years earlier.

***Shivers* (aka *They Came from Within; The Parasite Murders*)
(1975) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...a strong science-fiction/horror mixture with disgusting images never before witnessed.... Cronenberg’s continuing theme is science gone mad for science’s sake.... The writer/director explores that concept with exploitative glee. Nothing is too outrageous for Cronenberg to conceive and film.”—Richard Meyers, SF 2, *Citadel Press*, 1984, page 31.

“It’s apparent that someone connected with *They Came from Within* has an impertinent sense of humor even though the film is so tackily written and directed, so darkly photographed and the sound so dimly recorded that it’s difficult to stay with it.—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, July 7, 1976, page 46.

“The contrast between the clinical world of the Starliner complex and its casually promiscuous inhabitants turned into sex fiends by the rapidly spreading parasites is brilliantly captured by Cronenberg. The special effects ... are unusually shocking, not for their goriness in particular, but because they make visible and concrete the sense of uncleanness associated with the transmission of venereal disease.”—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 320.

“Cult horror with only the gore to sustain it for anyone other than Cronenberg anoraks.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 25.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Paul Hampton (Dr. Roger St. Luc); Joe Silver (Linsky); Lynn Lowry (Forsythe); Alan Mingleovsky (Nicholas Tudor); Susan Petrie (Janine Tudor); Ronald Miodak (Merrick); Camille Cucharme (Mr. Guilbault); Wally Martin (Doorman); Charles Perley (Delivery Boy); Barry Baldero (Detective Heller); Harika Posnansko (Mrs. Guilbault); Vrastra Vrana (Kresimer Suibeh); Al Rosenman (Parkins); Julie Wildman (Miss Lewis); Edith Johnson (Olive); Joy Coghill (Mona Wheatley); Fred Doederieien (Emil Hobbes); Arthur Grosser (Mr. Wolfe); Dorothy Davis (Vi); Joan Blackman (Elevator Mother); Sonny Forbes (Garbage Room Man); Barbara Steele (Betts); Silvie Debois (Brenda Suiben); Kursten Bishoprio (Elevator Daughter); Nora Johnson (Laundry Woman); Cathy Graham (Annabelle); Robert Bremen (Boy); Ron Whitten (Bearded Man); Denis Payne (First Elevator Man); Kevin Fenlow (Second Elevator Man).

CREW: John Dunning and Andre Link present a DAL-Reitman production, *Shivers*. *Director of photography:* Robert Saad. *Special Make-up and Creatures by:* Joe Blasco. *Editor:* Patrick Dodd. *Sound Supervisor:* Dan Goldberg. *Production Manager:* Don Carmody. *Music Supervisor:* Ivan Reitman. *Executive Producer:* Alfred Parisier. *Producer:* Ivan Reitman. *Written and Directed by:* David Cronenberg. *Stunts:* Fournier Ereres. *Continuity:* Diane Boucher. *Production Assistant:* Stewart Harding, Cliff Rothman. *First Assistant Camera:* Rick Maguire, Yves Drapeau. *Assistant to Joe Blasco:* David Dittmer. *Make-up:* Suzanne Riou Garand. *Make-up Assistant:* Louisette Champagne. *Art Director:* Eric Giserman. *Art Assistant:* Rose Marie McSherry. *Sound Studios:* Microphonic Sound. *Lab:* Quebec Film Labs. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 100 minutes.

“A lot of people pointed out a similarity between the parasite in *Alien* and the parasite in *Shivers*. I was disappointed in *Alien* ... the parasite device isn't used in a metaphorical way.... In *Shivers*, the parasite stays inside the people and changes their behavior and their motives. It's used for ... more than simple shock value”²⁶.—Director David Cronenberg comments on the similarities between his low-budget *Shivers* (1975) and mega-hit *Alien* (1979).

SYNOPSIS: Something strange is happening at the Star Liner Apartments, a housing complex of the future replete with all the amenities one could desire. In one apartment (#15), a middle-aged man murders a young girl, using a scalpel first to dissect her and then to search for something in her stomach. The murderer is Dr. Hobbs, and he kills himself after committing the atrocity.

The police investigate and Dr. St. Luc (resident physician at Star Liner Apts.) learns that Hobbs had a grant involving new organ-replacement experiments. Apparently, he was breeding parasites that would dissolve failing organs and then replace them, performing their functions as a perfect substitute. Dr. St. Luc suspects something has gone badly wrong with the experiment.

Meanwhile, Nick, a resident at the complex who had sex with the dead girl, comes home from work feeling sick. His wife, Janine, is concerned about him because of a fatty cyst he has developed. Nick won't go to see a specialist, so Janine sees Dr. St. Luc to report Nick's symptoms. At the same time, her husband has a seizure and throws up in the bathtub. A slimy organism slithers down the drain. Later, the grisly worm-like parasite attacks and kills a fat woman in the laundry room.

St. Luc investigates and learns that the dead girl was apparently quite promiscuous, having sex with a number of males at the apartment complex. All those men are now reporting lumps in their stomach, evidence of a sexually transmitted disease ... or parasite. An associate of Dr. Hobbs' reports to St. Luc that his parasite is actually a combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease, which has the effect of making people highly libidinous (so the parasite

can spread...).

In one apartment, a parasite comes up a bathtub drain and slides between a female tenant's legs, entering her body through the exposed vagina. The parasitic infection spreads exponentially at Star Liner, turning people all over the campus into crazed rapists. One infected man tries to rape St. Luc's nurse, Forsythe, but she stabs him and escapes his advances. Meanwhile, Nick tries to force himself on Janine to spread the parasite, but Janine refuses. The parasite then evacuates through Nick's mouth.

Before long, the parasitic infection in the apartment complex has reached epidemic proportions. The phones are out, the hallways are dangerous and roving gangs of rapists, desperate to spread their infection, roam from apartment to apartment. Nurse Forsythe and Dr. St. Luc attempt to flee, but the parking garage doors are closed and all the exits are blocked. Before long, it becomes clear that Forsyth is now infected, and St. Luc knocks her out to prevent his own infection. Before long, St. Luc is hopelessly outnumbered. He attempts to escape via the pool room, but the night is filled with the infected. As St. Luc falls into the pool, he is surrounded by the zombies. He receives the kiss of infection from Forsythe.

The next morning, a line of cars drive out of Star Liner apartments, and the sexual predators seek new game in the city.

COMMENTARY: *Shivers* (or *They Came from Within*) is a fascinating variation on George Romero's influential *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Like that film, *Shivers* features a closed-off setting and a mob of crazed villains (who are intent on devouring their prey). But where the two films differ is in focus. For Romero, his zombies are a method by which to debate the rise and fall of human society and the beginning of a new (anti-social) order. Director David Cronenberg reveals with *Shivers* (and in fact with his later film in the '70s, *Rabid*) that he is obsessed mostly with sex and the perceived fall-out of various sexual issues (such as infidelity, sexually transmitted diseases, pedophilia, and the like). *Shivers* concerns misguided science, man as the victim of his hormones, and a closed community in peril, but mostly it is about those things (including disease) that are carried along with the process of human sexual coupling.

Cronenberg opens the film with an advertisement for Star Liner Apartments, the setting for all the terror to come. This promotion reveals parking lots, fully equipped kitchens, heated Olympic-sized swimming pools, tennis courts, and golf courses. These apartments of the future also feature the trappings of a modern-day village including a delicatessen, a boutique, a dentist's office, and medical clinics. This advertisement for Star Liners saves Cronenberg the trouble of having to include all of the exposition in the text of the film. Instead, he gets it out of the way in a clever commercial, and establishes immediately how truly isolated and "self-sustaining" Star Liner is. This is important, because containment is a critical issue in the film.

From there, *Shivers* descends into a shocking series of vicious attacks. In one sequence an apparently crazed old man attacks a young, school-age girl. He strangles her, then throws her on a table, cuts her open, and pours acid in her open wound. Then he cuts his own throat. These violent, horrid images immediately, and rather thoroughly contrast with the "perfect world" envisioned by the preceding TV advertisement, revealing a harsh reality underneath the appearance of things.

Delightfully, Cronenberg is not interested in static interpretations of his symbols. His images represent different things at different points in the film. At the commencement of *Shivers*, the audience is horrified by the old man's brutal act against a seemingly innocent child. But before long, Cronenberg has established that the "innocent" schoolgirl was actually a sexually promiscuous host to a terrible parasite, and that her murder ... if unsavory ... was necessary if infection of the community was to be prevented. Of course, it is already too late, and this is just the first of many deaths.

But even this sequence is but a prelude to the true horror of the film. The scientist (named Hobbes) has bred an organism, a parasite that is transmitted through sex. This worm-like monster (which resembles human fecal matter both in shape and shading...) goes from person to person, husband to wife, lover to lover, in rapid succession. This rapid-fire spread of the "disease" reveals how quickly an infection can be transmitted in a closed community, and

one is reminded of a 1999 story about the 60 children in one American town who contracted syphilis after a few rounds of casual sex.

At work in *Shivers* is Cronenberg's fear of sexually transmitted diseases. The queasiness one feels about venereal disease, herpes, AIDS or any other "bug" is granted physical, visual form as this parasite, and Cronenberg unflinchingly reveals it passing from person to person, worming its way into new "partners."

Accordingly, the film's gross-out factor is quite high. In one nauseating moment, a man vomits over his apartment ledge, and a bloody lump (the parasite) is ejected, striking an old lady's umbrella with a watery splat some levels below. Barbara Steele, luxuriating in a bathtub, is caught unaware as a parasite travels up the drain into the tub and swims between her legs. As it penetrates her, the bath water turns bloody. It's all quite graphic, but purposeful. There are consequences to "random" sexual encounters, says *Shivers*, and with the parasite's fatal and bizarre consequences the film, sadly, forecasts the AIDS era (the 1980s)—when sexual encounters could literally prove lethal.

Clearly, *Shivers* fits into the "topical" horror of the 1970s. Just as *It's Alive* openly worried about how the new age of pollution, X-rays, and nuclear power might change the human condition, *Shivers* asks its audience to contemplate what dangers may be hidden in the sexual act. Is there a dark side to the pleasure? Is "casual" sex dangerous, as well as immoral? In *Shivers*, sexual urges turn people into rapists, pervert morals, and spread sickness. In one harrowing sequence, a daughter watches as her mother is sexually assaulted in an elevator. Later the same child, now infected, seduces a guard, spreading the evil. Even innocence, corrupted by sex, can be infected.

The reason *Shivers* may not be a great film is that after the apartments has been overrun by the infected, the story stops, and the plot becomes a poor variation on *Night of the Living Dead*, with two heroes trying to escape from a mob of the "zombies." Up to that point, *Shivers* is thought-provoking, scary and original, so the retread plot is a disappointment. And, the protagonists are not terribly bright. A great deal of time in the finale seems spent

without any sense of narrative purpose or objective. Doctor St. Luc and Nurse Forsyth go down to the basement, up to the apartments, over to a phone, down to the garage, and so on. They have legitimate reasons for all their actions, but in a film like this it should be a choice between hiding or fleeing. Instead, these two medical professionals buzz all over the Star Line complex, continually putting themselves in new dangers.

Much has been made of the fact that *Shivers* forecasts *Alien* (1979) by depicting a wormlike entity that jumps on people's faces, and then perverts them from within. That argument holds only so much water. The so-called "face hugger" of *Shivers* appears only once (jumping out of a laundry machine) and that act of attachment does not seem to typify the lifecycle of the sexual parasite. In *Alien*, the face hugger morphs into chest-burster, and then into a giant, malevolent humanoid organism. It is a distinct and separate cycle. There may be some surface similarities, but to say that *Alien* "copies" *Shivers* is an exaggeration. *Alien* also benefits from compelling, recognizable human characters, a factor *Shivers* may have benefited from. The story, its implications, and even its final turn, the spread of the infection beyond Star Liner, works beautifully, but the characters are never smart enough, or easy enough to identify with.

***The Stepford Wives* (1975) * * * ***

Critical Reception

"The best social horror movies achieve their effect by implication, and *The Stepford Wives*, by showing us only the surface of things and never troubling to explain exactly how these things are done, implies plenty."—Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, a Berkley Book, 1981, page 168.

"...a well-made, entertaining movie. On a certain level the film works successfully, building up an effective mood of paranoia and tension ... but as science fiction ... it doesn't quite work."—John Brosnan, *Future Tense*, St. Martin's Press, 1978,

page 230.

“Writer Goldman and director Forbes have done workmanlike jobs in pumping some life and even some entertainment into Levin’s one-gimmick book, but they are somewhat at cross-purposes. Goldman sees an opportunity to satirize middle-class mores.... Forbes, on the other hand, sees an opportunity for serious suspense ... it aspires to be a woman’s lib parable ... but it is too glibly on the side of the fashionable angels.”—Richard Schickel, *Time*: “Women’s Glib,” March 3, 1975, page 6.

“...what happens ... makes for an interesting satire and a horror story about the relations of men and women today, although ... both male and female proponents won’t find the film convincing.... But the film is entertaining, with some wildly funny moments ... it’s well-paced and has good acting.”—Dorothy Somers, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVI, Number 4, April 1975, page 247.

Cast and Crew

CAST: Katharine Ross (Joanna); Paula Prentiss (Bobby); Peter Masterson (Walter); Nanette Newman (Carol); Tina Louise (Charmaine); Carol Bossen (Dr. Fancher); William Prince (Ike Mazzara); Carole Mallory (Kit Sanderson); Toni Reid (Marie Axhelm); Judith Baldwin (Mrs. Cornell); Barbara Rucker (Marie Ann Stavros); George Coe (Claude Axhelm); Franklin Cover (Ed Wimpiris); Robert Fields (Raymond Chandler); Michael Higgins (Mr. Cornell); Josef Somer (Ted Van Sant); Paula Trueman (Welcome Wagon Lady); Martha Greenhouse (Mrs. Kirgassa); Simon Deckard (David Markowe); Remak Ramsay (Mr. Atkinson); Mary Stuart Masterson (Kim); Ronny Sullivan (Amy); John Aprea (Young Cop); Matt Russo (Moving Man #1); Anthony Crup (Moving Man #2); Keith

McMillan (Market Manager); Dee Wallace (Nettie the Maid); Tom Spratley (Doorman); Patrick O'Neal (Dale Coba).

CREW: Palomar Pictures International Presents *The Stepford Wives*. Based on a Novel by: Ira Levin. Costume Designer: Anna Hill Johnstone. Film Editor: Timothy Gee. Production Design: Gene Callahan. Director of Photography: Owen Roizman. Music Composed and Conducted by: Michael Small. Associate Producer: Roger M. Rothstein. Executive Producer: Gustave M. Berne. Screenplay: William Goldman. Produced by: Edgar J. Scherick. Directed by: Bryan Forbes. Camera Operator: Enrique Bravo. Drawings by: Don Bachardy. Casting: Juliet Taylor. First Assistant Director: Peter Scoppa. Second Assistant Director: Mike Haley. Unit Manager: Neil Machlis. Titles: Robert Ellis. First Assistant Camera: Tom Priestly. Make-up Artist: Andy Ciannella. Hairdresser: Romaine Greene. Wardrobe: George Newman, Peggy Farrell. Script Supervisor: B.J. Bjorkman. Set Decorator: Robert Drumheller. Property Master: Joseph M. Caracciolo. Sound Mixer: James Sabat. Re-recording Mixer: Dick Vorisek. Assistant Editor: Patrick McMahon. Scenic Artist: Stanley Cappiello. Second Assistant Camera: Gary Muller. Sound Editor: Janet Davidson. Electronic Music Realized by: Suzanne Ciani. Locations by: Cine Mobile Systems. Color: TVC. A Fadsin Cinema Association Production. M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 120 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: The Eberharts move from the hustle and bustle of New York City to the sheltered village of Stepford. Walter Eberhart's wife, Joanna, is an amateur photographer, and none too thrilled about the move, partially because Walter didn't bother to consult her about it. Joanna comes to feel isolated in the big house in the country, and these feelings worsen when Walter joins a "men's only" association in Stepford.

At the local grocery store, the Eberharts witness a car accident in which a strange neighbor, Mrs. Van Sant, is jostled. After the incident, she starts behaving erratically: repeating stock phrases, and acting in almost mechanical fashion. Joanna takes note of the odd behavior, as well as the fact that the ambulance carts Ms. Van Sant in the opposite direction from the town hospital. Joanna's suspicions about Stepford grow when Walter returns from the Men's Club initiation in tears. He brushes off his behavior, and does not share with his wife what has upset him.

Soon, Joanna makes her first friend in Stepford, another transplanted city woman named Bobby. This friendship makes Joanna's transition easier, and she is even receptive when Walter invites members of his men's group over for a meeting late one night. One of the male guests is "Diz," Dale Gribble, who used to work at Disneyland and now heads the Men's Association. The men seem to take a special interest in Joanna, and one gentleman even sketches her. After the party, Joanna fights with Walter about the men, who she thinks are humorless bores.

Then, there is a party at Diz's house, and Bobby and Joanna again run into Mrs. Van Sant, who is speaking in the same stock phrases as on the day of the accident. The next day, she goes around town apologizing for her behavior, claiming to be a recovering alcoholic. Her apology, driven by the men of the town, infuriates Joanna and spurs her to think about forming a women's lib group. Interestingly, none of the women in Stepford seem remotely interested in the idea. On the contrary, they are too busy baking, cleaning and raising children to worry about civil rights. Still, Bobby and Joanna enlist one local, the flamboyant Charmain. She is tired of the Men's Association too, and all too eager to stir up a bit of trouble. Joanna enlists other town women only after she refuses to help with a Men's Association "dialect" project.

Unfortunately, at the first meeting of the women's group, the Stepford wives are interested only in talking about how to more efficiently complete their housework. An increasingly suspicious Joanna takes a walk one night, and finds the mansion where the Men's Association meets. She is warned away from the property by a policeman. The next day, Joanna and Bobby meet with Charmain

only to find she has suddenly changed. Where she was once an opinionated, assertive human being, she is now a loyal and dutiful servant who supports her husband without question, without thought even. This transformation disturbs Joanna and Bobby, and they begin to fear that something in the water is turning women into drones.

With the aid of Joanna's old boyfriend, a chemist, the water is tested ... and found to be fine. Desperate, Bobby determines to move out of Stepford before she is a victim of the plague that turns women into subservient sex objects. Joanna makes the same decision and begs Walter to move. He acquiesces, and promises to move from Stepford in August, just two months away.

Before long, Joanna loses another critical ally. She meets with Bobby only to learn that Bobby isn't Bobby anymore. She now wears make-up in the kitchen, serves as a maid to her husband, and is unwilling to leave Stepford. Panicked, Joanna asks Walter to move again, and then sees a psychologist about her fears. The psychologist is supportive and tells Joanna to leave Stepford as soon as possible if she feels endangered. Empowered, Joanna returns home to take her children from Walter, but he has sent them away. Worse, he has been drinking and is violent with Joanna when she refuses to go to bed.

While Walter is on the phone, talking in hushed tones, Joanna sneaks out into the rainy night to find her children. She seeks help from Bobby, and ends up stabbing her one-time friend with a kitchen knife. Amazingly, Bobby does not bleed. Instead, she starts to malfunction, as if some bizarre automaton. Still hoping to find her children, Joanna finds herself at the Men's Association mansion. She walks into a trap orchestrated by "Diz" Coba, a man who once designed "smart" animatronic robots for Disney attractions. He informs her that he has been waiting for her, and that her change will be "just perfect" for Walter and for her. Desperate not to meet the same fate as Charmaine and Bobby, Joanna runs for her life, and ends up confronting an exact replica of herself, a robot. There, at a make-up table, a robot duplicate of Joanna sits ready, with black, soulless eyes and abnormally enlarged breasts. Shocked, Joanna is killed by her "replacement."

Later, at a grocery store, Joanna, Bobby, Charmain and all the robot wives of Stepford enjoy their day out ... thinking only how they can best serve their men. Life goes on in Stepford, after a peculiar fashion.

COMMENTARY: It's a man's world. No matter how far the "equal rights" movement has come, that's a basic truth of our lives, even in the 21st century. Has there ever been a female president of the United States? A woman vice president? Do women receive an "equal day's pay" for an equal day's work? Unfortunately, the answer is no in all cases. In fact, even in 2001 some very powerful men believe they should be able to control a woman's reproductive choices, that they should have final say over what she does with her own biology, her own body. In the 1970s, the situation was, if anything, worse. The Equal Rights Amendment was torpedoed, and though advertisements shouted "you've come a long way, baby," that simply wasn't the case. The trend that occurred in the '70s, with the proliferation of the birth control pill and a more lax moral attitude about sexual liaisons, was actually self-serving for men. They got to have more intercourse with more women, with fewer consequences (such as pregnancy). If that was the "yardstick" for equality in America, then the definition was sadly lacking.

Out of this context of the "war between the sexes" comes *The Stepford Wives*, a socially minded horror film that sees (and ridicules) the male hierarchy that dominated (and dominates) the United States. The film is a sort of re-vamp of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), with the casualty here being not the whole human race, but the female population of suburban America. They are secretly "changed," and their wills subverted by the Men's Association of the little town of Stepford. But *The Stepford Wives'* true strength is that it expertly fosters viewer sympathy with its lead character, Joanna. As played by Katharine Ross, Joanna is so likeable an individual that the viewer understands immediately what is at stake for her in Stepford. For her to conform to the "simple" roles of women in that town would be worse than death for her. It would be the loss of her identity, her individuality, and that is a horror that every human, male or female, understands implicitly.

Directed by Bryan Forbes, *The Stepford Wives* is actually a film essay about what it means to be part of an unspoken “underclass.” This is Joanna’s picture, and it is clear that she is a second class citizen in her own country. The film opens with Joanna sitting alone near her apartment’s window. The staging of the shot indicates her isolation and loneliness. She is being forced to move out of the city against her will, and the window separates her from the thriving world she wishes to be a part of. The image of a woman sitting alone in silence is one to meditate about. It is an insightful visual because it reveals that Joanna is upset and lonely, but also that she is thinking. She is pondering her situation in that shot, and that is a critical point to make. Joanna is a thinker, a contemplator, as the film takes special measures to remind us, and her intelligence will be lost if Stepford has its way.

From that opening, Joanna is forced to move to Stepford, where she finds herself knocking about alone in a vast, empty house. Her husband, Walter, treats her as a child, not allowing her to play a part in the family decisions. *He* decided to move. *He* decided on the particular house to buy. *He* joined the Men’s Association. Like the men of Stepford, Walter sees himself as the ultimate authority in the family, the wise patriarch responsible for taking care of his wife and children. He doesn’t see or understand that Joanna wants a hand in her own destiny. Joanna is trapped in a marriage to a man that doesn’t share responsibility and decisions with her. She regrets the decision to marry him because she was once in love with a chemist. She believed Walter would become “Perry Mason,” but he didn’t.

Interestingly, the movie also bashes Joanna’s former lover, Raymond Chandler. She loved him once, but he’s an asshole now. The point is plain: a woman can’t depend on a man to live up to the values and ideals he espouses. Ultimately, a man wants a woman to be a servant to his needs, and Joanna’s independent voice cannot thrive in such a set-up.

Commendably, there’s a deeper level to *The Stepford Wives*. Joanna is not defined, as women so often are in our society, by her desire to have children, to be a mother. To the contrary, Joanna has aspirations to be an artist. “I want to be remembered,” she notes of

her art. That puts her on “equal” territory with males. Don’t men often note that they want accomplishments of their own, achievements outside of marriage and a family? That element is what makes Joanna special: she doesn’t see herself as her society would. Children are not the end-all and be-all for her as a human being. The intellectual pursuit of art and photography, and the need for a professional legacy inform her character ... just as we would stereotypically expect them to do a man’s. The film’s success is that it makes plain and tangible Joanna’s feelings of emptiness, and her desire to have the same things men automatically expect to get in this life.

In horror, terror is always much more effective when an identifiable human character is at the heart of the situation. *The Stepford Wives* is so splendid a film because its protagonist is not just a big blank mark in the middle of the action that is swept along by circumstances. She is an individual, a person, and that makes her ultimate fate (the removal of all that individuality) doubly terrifying.

The Stepford Wives must concern itself with more than Joanna, however, if it is to work as a “conspiracy” thriller, and fortunately, it does. The film has a wicked, but not far off, view of men. The Men’s Association of Stepford re-programs all the women to serve husbands’ needs. Men have simple needs: they want food, a clean house, and sex. Accordingly, all the women are “revised” to serve those basic desires. “I’ll just die if I don’t get this recipe,” one Stepford wife, Mrs. Van Sant, repeats constantly, as if her husband’s stomach is the most important thing in the world.

“Nobody’s ever touched me the way you have, Frank,” another Stepford wife moans as her husband makes love to her. “You’re the king, Frank! You’re the champion! You’re the master!” she continues. This scene is not only funny, but it points out every man’s fantasy: to be worshipped in bed. The Men’s Association has arranged for that too. Women have literally become sex slaves with no significant need beyond tending to the fragile egos of their husbands.

When people that Joanna knows start to change in Stepford, the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* template comes into full play, but

again the concept has been re-wired to accommodate sexual politics. People start to “change,” and the “altered” women become the equivalent of the alien pods in *Body Snatchers*. One day Bobby’s face and very figure are different. Her vocabulary is smaller, and she is nothing but a sexy house maid. Worse, she does not even realize that a change has occurred. She is a pod, a walking-talking imitation without a soul. It’s a chilling premise, and the conspiracy and horror elements of *The Stepford Wives* are carried out brilliantly. There are some echoes of *Rosemary’s Baby* since the horror involves a treacherous husband, a seemingly “paranoiac” wife, and a malevolent conspiracy.

The film even revives an old Gothic tradition by setting its headquarters of evil in a dark old mansion. There, Joanna comes face to face with a malevolent Doppelgänger. The setting and the situation (the “evil” double) reflect the anti-rational tenets of Gothic literature, and the “uncovering” of the town’s dark secret also plays into that literary tradition.

Even in the horror, however, there is appropriate humor. Joanna’s Doppelgänger is both terrifying (with black pools for eyes) and humorous because her breasts are much, much larger than those with which Katharine Ross has naturally been endowed. In other words, Walter wanted his “new” wife that way...

The final scene of *The Stepford Wives* is surreal, but terrifying in its implications. The women, including Joanna, are dressed to the hilt, strolling through a grocery store. They are serving men in their actions and appearance ... and utterly untroubled by their enslavement. This downbeat ending indicates that the male-controlled society is ultimately victorious, in life and in film. Eventually, you can’t fight city hall, and the “change” overcomes you, for whatever reason. It may be societal pressure to conform, or it may be evil Doppelgänger robots.

The real terror of *The Stepford Wives* is best expressed in Joanna’s fear mid-way through the picture when she realizes that her very soul, her identity, is truly at stake. She is aware that under the new regime she will cook and clean, but no longer be herself. She won’t be a photographer any more, because that “hobby” is not as important to her husband as having a “maid” who cleans the house

and calls him “the champion” in bed. Joanna understand that there are things that make us all special only to ourselves, and that those are the very things she will lose when “converted” into a Stepford wife. That’s why the situation is universal beyond the male-female issue. Forbes was wise to make Joanna so interesting and strong a character. In her, the audience sees not just a woman, but humanity, and that makes the film’s point about sex issues all the more powerful.

The Stepford Wives is a great horror film, and one of the best of the 1970s. It not only satirizes 1970s sexual politics, it does so with wit and scares. No doubt some conservative elements would see nothing wrong with the lives of the Stepford wives and would attack the film as liberal—but that’s the point isn’t it? One has to wonder if all the male critics who called the film poppycock were not willing to face their own role in furthering a male-dominated patriarchy. This film acknowledges uncomfortable truths for men, and it does so in a humorous, artful way. That should have been enough for critics, but the film was mostly dismissed as tongue in cheek during its release. Though humor is part of Forbes’ arsenal in *The Stepford Wives*, the film is anything but tongue in cheek. But, as is appropriate, audiences had the last word about the film. Today, more than twenty-five years after it was released, the term “Stepford wife” is cultural shorthand, a part of America’s modern lexicon. The film so powerfully made its point about sexual politics that, even if critics were unwilling to appreciate or laud it, the film nonetheless achieved immortality.

In the film, Joanna notes that she “wanted to be remembered” for what she achieved and what she stood for, not the clothes she wore or the children she bore. She’d be happy to know that *The Stepford Wives* has achieved that very legacy. It is a brilliantly visualized and conceived horror film, and so daring that it could only have been produced in the ’70s.

LEGACY: Though followed by a series of inferior TV movies including *Return of the Stepford Wives* (1980) and *The Stepford Children* (1988), this film remains a horror landmark. It is a movie that has entered the pop culture lexicon with a vengeance. Everybody knows what it means to be from “Stepford,” or a

“Stepford wife,” so the movie clearly captured (and still captures) the imagination of a nation. A 1997 horror film, *Disturbing Behavior*, delicately modified the Stepford formula, only this time with high school students. A remake of *The Stepford Wives* has been announced.

1976

Assault on Precinct 13 (1976) * * * ½

Critical Reception

“Bravura remake of *Rio Bravo* ... arguably still the best film [John Carpenter] ever made.”—Alan Jones, *Starburst*: “John Carpenter—Prince of Darkness,” May 1988, page 8.

“Skilfully paced and edited ... rich with Hawksian dialogue and humor.”—Jeffrey Wells, *Films in Review*: “New Fright Master John Carpenter,” April 1980, page 218.

“A superb, bloody thriller....”—Dave Golder, *SFX*: “L.A. Story,” November 1996, pages 54–56.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Austin Stoker (Lieutenant Bishop); Darwin Joston (Napoleon Wilson); Laurie Zimmer (Leigh); Martin West (Lawson); Charles Cyphers (Starker); Nancy Loomis (Julie); Tony Burton (Wells); Peter Brun (Ice Cream Man); Kim Richards (Kathy); John J. Fox (Warden); Henry Brandon (Chaney); Gilman Rankin (Bus Driver); Brent Keast (Radio Announcer); Maynard Smith (Police Commissioner); Cliff Battuello (First Guard); Horace Johnson (Second Guard).

CREW: The CKK Corporation Presents *Assault on Precinct 13*. *Director of Photography:* Douglas Knapp. *Film Editor:* John T. Chance (aka John Carpenter). *Filmed in:* Panavision and Metrocolor. *Art Director:* Tommy Wallace. *Assistant Cameramen:* William Waldman, Douglas Olivares. *Gaffer:* Jack English. *Best Boys:* William Mareneck, Michael Everett. *Key Grip:* Kurt Young. *Grip/driver:* Trippy Gafford. *Sound Recordist:* William Cooper. *Boom Man:* Alan Cassidy. *Make-up:* Donald Bledsoe. *Special Effects:* Richard Albain, Jr. *Still Photographer:* Rene Small. *Associate Producer:* Steve Fine. *Script Supervisor/Assistant Editor:* Debra Hill. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Louise Keyes. *Property Master:* Craig Stearns. *Second Assistant Editor:* Curt Schulkey. *Production Assistants:* Marla Miller, Blake Schaefer, Randy Moore, Joceylne Stoikovitch, Tom Hanser. *Production Manager:* John Syrjamaki. *Assistant Director:* James Nichols. *Music:* John Carpenter. *Executive Producer:* Joseph Kaufman. *Produced by:* J.S. Kaplan. *Written and Directed by:* John Carpenter. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In east Los Angeles, the gang problem rages out of control as open warfare erupts between law enforcement and armed, organized criminals. On one night, a bloody shoot-out occurs in the Anderson ghetto and six members of the gang "Street Thunder" are gunned down by police. Surviving members of the gang steal a cache of automatic weapons and silencers, and swear revenge. The police commissioner warns people that the city is in real danger from this threat.

The next morning, African-American police lieutenant Bishop begins his new assignment. He is ordered to Precinct 9, Division 13, where he will assume authority from Captain Gordon. The precinct, located in Anderson, is being abandoned, and personnel and equipment must be transported to Ellendale. But, for one night, Bishop is to command the precinct house with a skeleton crew.

Elsewhere, another policeman, Starker, transports a bus of

dangerous convicts to death row. Wells, Cordell and the notorious murderer Napoleon Wilson are aboard the vehicle, and Starker, though stern, shows Wilson courtesy and respect. En route to Sonora, Cordell becomes ill, and Starker orders the bus off the freeway to the nearest police precinct, in Anderson.

Meanwhile, a little girl, Kathy, and her father become lost in Anderson. When Kathy's father stops at a phone booth for directions, Kathy is gunned down by members of Street Thunder while ordering an ice cream cone from a vendor. In a rage, Kathy's father pursues the thugs to a parking lot and kills one of the gang. Realizing his life is now in danger, Kathy's dad seeks protection at Bishop's precinct.

Before long, Street Thunder strikes the precinct. Armed with automatic weapons and silencers, dozens of gang members systematically lay siege to the skeleton crew hunkered down in the police building. Straker is killed in the first assault, as is Cordell. Then, representatives from the vicious gang approach again, throwing down a *chollo*—a white banner decorated with their colors—and smash a bowl of blood on the pavement. Leigh, a police secretary, and Bishop realize the ritual confirms that this battle is “to the death.” They’ve been marked for extermination.

In need of manpower, Bishop sends Leigh to free Napoleon Wilson and Wells from their locked cells, even as the gang attacks again. As the siege continues, Bishop tells his wards that he will protect all of them, including Kathy's dad, at all costs. But with only a few weapons to hold the well-armed gang at bay, that will be no easy task. Wells escapes from the building, on a mission to seek help, but is executed in short order by the gang. This leaves Bishop, Leigh, Wilson and Kathy's dad to seek sanctuary in the basement. As the criminals attack in force, Bishop targets an acetylene tank with his rifle and blasts it, causing a tremendous explosion. The thugs are fatally wounded in the ensuing blast, and the crisis is resolved. A mutual friendship has developed between criminal Wilson and policeman Bishop, and together the two men walk tall out of the precinct.

COMMENTARY: John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* is a fun blend of two separate and prominent film ancestors: the Howard

Hawks western *Rio Bravo* (1959) starring John Wayne, Dean Martin, Walter Brennan, Ricky Nelson and Angie Dickinson, and George A. Romero's low-budget horror landmark *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) starring Duane Jones, Karl Hardman and Judith O'Dea. As unlike as these two movie sources are in intent, setting and texture, Carpenter successfully marries them. Taking no prisoners, *Assault on Precinct 13* is a lean, mean exciting horror motion picture.

As has often been written, *Rio Bravo* stands tall among director Carpenter's favorite films. Based on the short story by B. H. Campbell, the western concerned Sheriff John T. Chance (Wayne), his recovering alcoholic deputy, Dude (Martin), and an old man named Stumpy (Brennan) as they fended off the forces of Nathan Burdette, a rancher whose brother was incarcerated on charges of murder in Chance's jail. The villainous Burdette sealed off the frontier town of Rio Bravo so that Chance and his friends would be isolated, and more likely to surrender their prisoner. Instead, Chance made his stand, and defeated the Burdettes. It was a tale of heroism, but also of friendship and romance. There was significant male bonding in the picture between Wayne, Martin and Nelson, and Carpenter took note of the charismatic relationships. Those looking for it will find a similar relationship in *Assault on Precinct 13*, between Wilson and Bishop. In *Rio Bravo*, Angie Dickinson was Feathers, the Hawksian woman, and the same role is fulfilled here by Laurie Zimmer.

On a very basic level, *Assault* and *Rio Bravo* concern a trio of diverse heroes in a crisis. In *Rio Bravo*, the heroes are (as described by Burdette) a "sheriff, a barfly and a cripple." In *Assault*, the heroes are a police lieutenant, a woman, and a hardened criminal. Not quite the same thing, but close.

The similarities between *Rio Bravo* and *Assault on Precinct 13* do not end with the heroes and the central conflict. Various incidents from the earlier film are repeated in Carpenter's work, almost verbatim. In *Rio Bravo*, Dude detects a Burdette thug in the rafters of a saloon because the criminal is wounded and blood is dripping down into a beer mug. In *Assault*, the baffled police, unable to locate the Anderson disturbance, detect evidence of the crime when the blood

of a murdered phone company employee drips on the roof of their patrol car.

In another striking visual reference to *Rio Bravo*, Bishop throws Napoleon Wilson a shotgun at the very instant a group of rampaging thugs are about to open fire on him. This recalls the *Rio Bravo* instance when Colorado throws Chance his shotgun as Burdette's hired guns circle in for the kill.

Even the climaxes of *Rio Bravo* and *Assault on Precinct 13* are mirror images. Chance, Dude and Stumpy force Burdette's surrender by blowing up a wagon of dynamite in *Rio Bravo*. In *Assault*, Bishop, Wilson and Leigh stop their opponents cold by blowing up an acetylene tank.

Interestingly, the villainous gang members of *Assault* seem to have been inspired not by Howard Hawks, but by George Romero. In *Night of the Living Dead*, a group of diverse people sought refuge in a farmhouse as the living dead wandered the countryside. The zombies were depicted as faceless goons, an evil force dangerous because of their numbers. And because they were already dead, they were virtually unstoppable, able to survive in the face of multiple gunshots (unless shot in the head). In *Assault on Precinct 13*, those very unnerving qualities are passed onto the members of Street Thunder. They mindlessly attack the station, one after the other, despite the fact they are decimated by police bullets. In basic terms, the gang members are robots, programmed by their hatred to destroy their opponents. In both films, this strange inhuman behavior is granted surface plausibility and legitimacy through a scientific explanation. In *Night of the Living Dead*, radiation from the Venus probe causes the epidemic of the living dead. In *Assault*, Bishop listens to a radio announcer report unusual "sunspot activity." In both cases, the main characters look for answers not in themselves, but in the stars.

Romero and Carpenter share other facets in their siege stories. In both films, the primary hero is African-American. In both films there is an attempt to escape the siege in a vehicle, and in both films, that escape plan proves deadly. Molotov cocktails also play significant roles in each film.

Indicative of the “new freedom” of the 1970s, *Assault on Precinct 13* also breaks the limits of acceptable violence in an absolutely shocking sequence. Young Kathy skips blissfully to an ice cream truck, and only moments later is brutally gunned down in cold blood—on screen. This may seem like excessive, random violence to many viewers, but some would argue that is precisely Carpenter’s point. After *Jonesboro*, *Columbine* and the rest, who can stand up and argue believably that moments like these don’t occur, even to innocent children? Carpenter does not shy away from the horrific aspects of his tale, and that is what truly separates him from Hawks. He keeps the relationships and male bonding quite intact, but his characters inhabit a much tougher, more nihilistic world. Yet in a strange way, that nihilism makes the character relationships all the more significant in *Assault on Precinct 13*. Bishop and Wilson may be separated by the law and by race, but they find common ground in their morality and decency. In a film about death and survival, that message of unity is encouraging.

Assault on Precinct 13 is a terrific action-horror film because it so audaciously melds the western genre of the Hawks variety with the graphic violence and gritty reality of modern horror pictures such as *Night of the Living Dead*. The result is a movie of ingenuity, cunning and thrills. Its parents are surely disparate, but Carpenter connects the pieces in dedicated, artistic fashion.

***Burnt Offerings* (1976) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

“...superior supernatural possession-thriller ... succeeds because producer-director Dan Curtis has enough confidence in his material to pitch the level of suspense at a low key. While he has certain weaknesses—reverting to his TV bred reliance on the zoom lens when a more formal visual approach would be more appropriate—he is most secure with his actors, in particular harnessing Reed’s visceral screen presence.”—Steve Swires, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVII, Number 9, November 1975, page 568.

“...such is his [director Dan Curtis’s] ability that at the approach of the denouement, members of the [preview] audience began murmuring and shouting nervous jokes in a vain effort to break the undeniable tension.... It’s the kind of movie that does for summer homes what *Jaws* did for a dip in the surf.”—Lawrence Van Gelder, *New York Times*, September 30, 1976, page 30.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Karen Black (Marian); Oliver Reed (Ben); Burgess Meredith (Arnold Allodice); Eileen Heckert (Roz Allodice); Lee H. Montgomery (Ben); Dub Taylor (Walker); Bette Davis (Aunt Elizabeth); Joseph Riley (Ben’s Father); Todd Turquand (Young Ben); Orin Camon (Minister); Jim Myers (Dr. Ross); Anthony James (Chauffeur).

CREW: P.E.A. Films, Inc., Presents a film by Dan Curtis, *Burnt Offerings*. *Production Designer:* Eugene Lourie. *Film Editor:* Dennis Virkler. *Music:* Robert Cobert. *Director of Photography:* Jacques Marquette. *Additional Photography:* Stevan Lerner. *Associate Producer:* Robert Singer. *Based on the Novel by:* Robert Marasco. *Screenplay:* William F. Nolan and Dan Curtis. *Produced and Directed by:* Dan Curtis. *Production Supervisor:* Ira Loonstein. *Costume Designer:* Ann Roth. *Casting:* Linda Otto. *Production Executive:* Jason E. Squire. *Music Box Theme:* Robert Cobert. *Unit Production Manager:* Joseph Ellis. *First Assistant Director:* Howard Grace. *Set Decorator:* Solomon Brewer. *Make-up Artist:* Al Fleming. *Hairstylists:* Graham Meech-Burkstone and Peggy Shannon. *Assistant Editor:* Bud Klotchman. *Script Supervisor:* Alan Greedy. *Camera Operator:* Sven Walnum. *First Assistant Camera:* Brad May. *Sound Mixer:* David Ronne. *Props:* Phil Ankrom and Hermes Arce. *Special Effects:* Clifford Wenger. *Stunts:* Dar Robinson. *Titles and Opticals:* Howard A.

Anderson Co., Inc. *Camera Equipment*: Panavision.
Color by: DeLuxe. Produced in association with Dan
Curtis Productions, Inc. Production Services
provided by the Casa Company. Filmed at
Dunsmuir House and Gardens, Oakland, California.
M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. *Running Time*: 116 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: With their 12-year-old son Davey in tow, Marian and Ben Raul drive to the country to rent a magnificent old house for the duration of their summer vacation. Once at the Allodice home, a sweeping mansion in a state of disrepair, Ben and Marian meet Roz and Arnold Allodice, the owners. Ben and Marian are offered a great deal by the couple: they can stay at the house for only \$900 the whole summer. The only catch is that old Mrs. Allodice, 85-year-old mother to Arnold and Roz, will remain in the home while the siblings leave for the season. She will continue to live in her attic suite, and Marian and Ben will have to check in on her and bring her meals.

Although Ben is reluctant to rent the home, fearing a catch, Marian is enamored of the place, and the decision to move in is made. Almost immediately after moving in during July, Marian decides she alone will care for Mrs. Allodice. She forbids her family to go upstairs and disturb the old woman ... who seems to sleep an awful lot.

As the summer passes, Marian cleans up the mansion: rolling out long-forgotten carpets, winding the clocks, and continuing to attend to the unseen tenant in the attic. Meanwhile, Ben gets the swimming pool cleaned, and finds an Allodice family cemetery on the property. Then, one day, Ben mysteriously attempts to drown Davey in the pool as if overcome by a strange force. Davey survives the encounter, and Ben apologizes, but he has no explanation for his actions.

By night, Ben starts to experience an old nightmare he hoped to leave in the past. Specifically, he recalls his mother's funeral, and a gaunt hearse driver with a terrifying smile. Troubled and unhappy, Ben feels the Allodice house is to blame for his strange mood. As for Marian, she hardly seems to notice or care that strange things are developing within her family. At first she is shocked to discover that

the house is actually regenerating itself like some kind of living creature, but she lies to Ben to hide the house's secret, and claims responsibility for the massive improvements occurring all over the campus.

As their stay in the Allodice house continues, the personalities of the visiting family change. Marian goes gray, loses all interest in sex, and becomes totally obsessed with Mrs. Allodice and the suite upstairs. Aunt Elizabeth, usually a perky, sharp-mouthed old dame, becomes weak and tired. And Ben continues his downward slide into childhood nightmares. Then, one night, Davey almost dies when his gas heater malfunctions and he is trapped in his room. Although Ben saves the boy, Marian blames Elizabeth for the incident because she was the last person to see the boy. Then, not long after, Elizabeth's health declines suddenly, her back snaps, and she dies. While waiting for the doctor, Ben has another frightening vision of the hearse chauffeur, that smiling nightmare from another time.

After Elizabeth's funeral, Ben becomes convinced the house is responsible for his aunt's death and the family's misery. He demands to see Mrs. Allodice, but when Marian refuses him permission, he leaves the house with Davey in tow. The escape is thwarted when trees fall in front of Ben's car—trapping the family on the grounds. Ben is injured attempting to escape, and Marian takes him back to the house to convalesce. By now, the house has shed its old, dilapidated skin, and looks like new. Worse than that, it still wants little Davey dead, and the house attempts to kill the boy while he is swimming. The threat to Davey's life finally breaks Marian free of the house's grip on her, and she agrees to leave it for good.

Before departing, Marian goes back to say goodbye to Mrs. Allodice. This act proves to be the family's undoing, as the house strikes back with a vengeance. When Ben follows Marian in, he finds she has aged and become possessed by the evil spirit of Mrs. Allodice—who was never really present in the house! Confronted with this new enemy, Ben is hurtled out the attic window by the evil force, and he crashes, face first, into a car windshield far below. Little Davey, splattered with his dead father's blood, attempts to flee the scene,

but a chimney crumbles high above and the debris tumbles on the screaming boy, an avalanche of brick. With Davey and Ben finally out of the way, the possessed Marian—now Mrs. Allodice—welcomes her children, Roz and Arnold, back home.

COMMENTARY: Haunted house movies are problematic. They require a high degree of stupidity on the part of their central characters. The tenants of haunted houses always stay well beyond the point of reason, or even sanity, and so there is sometimes a feeling that the protagonists are to blame for their misfortunes. One is reminded of the ad line of *The Amityville Horror* (1979): “For God’s Sake Get Out!” Most movies set in haunted houses have audiences contemplating that very thought. Some movies, such as *The Haunting* (1963) or *The Legend of Hell House* (1973) get around the problem by sending teams of “investigators” into the haunted realms. Then at least, the characters have reasons for staying in imminent danger. The point of this contemplation is that haunted house movies must play very, very carefully if suspension of disbelief is to be fostered. Plot points must be revealed at the right time, and when a manifestation is revealed (or not revealed) is quite important.

Which brings the discussion to Dan Curtis’s 1976 entry in the haunted house sweepstakes, *Burnt Offerings*. Overall, it does a pretty good job with this difficult, inherently flawed horror sub-genre, even if it asks the audience to accept some pretty shaky premises. But delightfully, Curtis seems to have studied up on filmmaking since his lackluster early ’70s entries, *House of Dark Shadows* (1970) and *Night of Dark Shadows* (1971). His work on *Burnt Offerings* is the stuff of a thoughtful, curious filmmaker. First off, Curtis understands that the Allodice house, if it is to be effective, must play almost as a human character itself. To that end, Curtis films it as though it were the “human” villain of the piece. His camera frequently adopts unnaturally low angles, which build a sense of menace. He also uses a slow, deliberate zoom as characters interact with the house, and he pans purposefully about to map out the terrain of the battle. There are so many long shots of the interior of the Allodice home that the audience feels it has been there before. The details of the rooms are as prominent as the human characters.

Curtis also utilizes purposeful dialogue to define the house's nature. "This house takes care of itself," Meredith's character declares early on, noting offhandedly that the residence has a sort of sentience. "This house will be here long, long after you're gone," another character notes with foreboding. Later, Reed tells Black that she is "accepting the house" because she is "part of it," insinuating that the house has a deleterious effect on his enamored wife. There are other instances too, and the many remarks about the house lend the feeling that it is a player in the drama. Since the house soon begins to repair itself, and is revealed to have a mind of its own, this is all solid preparation work. The ending, which sees the house striking back at the family, plays better because the audience is already thinking in terms of an entity, not so much brick and wood.

One of the aspects that makes *The Amityville Horror* a better film than most realize is that, as Stephen King points out, it plays on a fear of economic disaster. The haunted house of that film is a money pit that strikes back against the Lutz family by challenging their pocketbooks. They can't afford the mortgage, a wad of money mysteriously disappears, George Lutz's business is in jeopardy, etc. In other words, there is a subtext in *The Amityville Horror* that most homeowners can relate to. A house is a wonderful thing, but it is also a giant vacuum cleaner, sucking away gobs of money. *Burnt Offerings* utilizes a different template, but there is a subtext to this film too.

Specifically, the house in *Burnt Offerings* represents materialism, and the way in which the need and desire to own material possessions can cause an alienation of affection among spouses and families. Soon after moving into her new house, Marian (Black) is no longer interested in sex with her husband. The need to clean and fix the house becomes paramount to her. The "space" of the house, the ownership of it becomes a substitute for emotional closeness. Accordingly, "things" in the house become more and more important to Marian. She angrily attacks Davey for breaking a crystal bowl. She cries over the broken pieces, not the harm she has done to her son or the hurt she has caused her husband by emotionally distancing herself from him. Appropriately, Ben (Reed) finally asks his wife, point-blank, "What is more important to you, the house, all this ... or us?" The final answer is that the house—the

material thing—is more important to Marian. Her response that “this house is everything we’ve ever wanted,” pinpoints the nature of the debate. The house is just a thing, but it has replaced Ben in Marian’s affections.

This subtext is played out in the climax in an interesting way. Ben is unhappy with Marian because the house consumes her. She is no longer the fun-loving wife who liked to go on outings and enjoyed sex with him. In other words, she has grown old. The film visualizes that concept in the startling conclusion when Black becomes aged before our eyes. Her hair grays, her eyes become dead, and her outer physical appearance finally mirrors her soul. She has gone from being young to old both physically and metaphorically. It’s quite effective.

There’s a subplot in the film that Dan Curtis also handles very well too. It involves Ben’s dream of a malevolent hearse driver. This apparition, a smiling demon in sunglasses, is terribly frightening. The hearse pulls up in the front yard of the Allodice house and the smiling driver is suddenly right there, and for whatever reason, he is chilling. It is hard to say exactly why it is an effective image. A hearse is associated with death, obviously, and the idea that a hearse driver is a cheery, smiling thing is pretty sick. It’s as if he enjoys the death he parades about. Maybe it’s just that the actor portraying the driver is terrifying in a physical sense. He looks oddly skeletal, and the fact that his eyes are hidden behind shimmering sunglasses doesn’t help. There’s not much that’s recognizably human in the ghoul, and perhaps that is the reason he is so scary.

The terror in this subplot reaches a crescendo as the hearse driver comes for Aunt Elizabeth. He enters the bedroom and slams her coffin into the room (into the camera, in fact), still grinning that awful smile. This smiling evil who knocks on your door, representing death, is the most effective horror image in *Burnt Offerings*.

The film’s performances are, overall, quite good. Bette Davis is notable, as one would expect. Her character is the most sympathetic and human among the family. Elizabeth is coping with senility, the loss of her faculties—all at the hands of the evil house—and viewers

sympathize with her. Black's performance borders on camp, as she becomes possessed by, essentially, the perfect hausfrau. She's in housekeeper overdrive, never still, always spouting ridiculous dialogue about how wonderful the house is. It's a bizarre performance about a strange character in a strange situation. As for Reed, he is forced to be primarily a "reactor," feeling the greatest fear as the Allodice house spins its evil web. It is a different kind of role for Reed because he usually projects confidence and strength. Here, he has the stereotypically "female" role as the one person who understands the house is truly evil.

There are some nagging flaws in *Burnt Offerings* that prevent it from being a truly great film. Continuity is sloppy, particularly in the early portions of the movie. In one of the first scenes, Reed enters the Allodice house for the first time. At the front entrance of the house (an exterior shot) he is wearing glasses. The very next shot, as he enters (an interior angle) his glasses have disappeared. When the scene goes back to the exterior shot—*wham*—the glasses reappear. And, the film's major leap in credibility, going back to this review's opening remark about "disbelief," involves Mrs. Allodice. Nobody seems to think it odd that she is never seen or heard throughout the entire picture. Curtis tries to obscure that plot point as much as possible behind the supernatural spectacle of boiling swimming pools and malevolent hearse drivers, but the fact is that suspicion about Allodice's absence is fostered early on. It's a critical flaw in an otherwise interesting script.

Burnt Offerings is a pretty good, smart horror film. The opening shots, with a station wagon navigating a curving road, seem an homage to the opening moments of *Night of the Living Dead*, and the horror mechanisms—falling trees, chimneys, et cetera—are handled with aplomb. A good cast and some solid direction keep the film on the right track throughout, and there are some genuine chills elicited, especially in those sequences of the hearse from hell.

Carrie (1976) * * * *

Critical Reception

"...DePalma has so transcended his easily-

exploitable material as to transform it into a poignant yet increasingly terrifying evocation of the tension between sexuality and religious obsession ... he counterpoints supernatural forces as external symbols of sexual repression.... His techniques are dazzling in their virtuosity—Wellesian camera pans, split screens, slow motion, his by-now-patented homages to Hitchcock....”—Steve Swires, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVIII, Number 1, January 1977, page 59.

“...it’s debatable who’s meaner to Carrie—her fellow students or her director, who draws out their elaborate prank for 90 minutes, then lovingly shoots its penultimate moments ... in slow motion. Her stylistically-extended ‘moment of glory’ here is an emotional fuse-blowing mixture of pseudo-lyricism and pseudo-irony.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 52.

“...a terrifyingly lyrical thriller.... Brian DePalma has mastered a teasing style—a perverse mixture of comedy and horror like that of Hitchcock or Polanski, but with a lulling sensuousness. He builds our apprehensions languorously, softening us for the kill. You know you’re being manipulated, but he works in such a literal way and with so much candor that you have the pleasure of observing how he affects your susceptibilities while you’re going into shock ... a funny archetypal nightmare.... No one else has ever caught the thrill that teenagers get from a dirty joke and sustained it for a whole picture.”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, November 22, 1976, page 177.

“*Carrie* is Brian DePalma’s best feature to date. It strikes a pleasing balance between plotline, character motivation, and visual style—a balance notably absent in *Sisters*, *Phantom of the Paradise*,

and *Obsession*.... In *Carrie* ... DePalma develops his familiar motifs of exploitation, guilt and sexual repression with a sure hand, so that his visual fireworks for the first time do not seem themselves obsessional and out of control.”—Paula Matusa, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXXI, Number 1: Fall 1977, page 32.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Sissy Spacek (Carrie White); Amy Irving (Sue Snell); William Katt (Tommy Ross); Nancy Allen (Chris Hargenson); John Travolta (Billy Nolan); Betty Buckley (Mrs. Collins); P.J. Soles (Norma); Sydney Lassick (Mr. Fromm); Stefan Gierasch (Mr. Morton); Priscilla Pointer (Mrs. Snell); Piper Laurie (Margaret White); Michael Talbott (Freddy); Doug Cox (the Beak); Harry Gold (George); Noelle North (Frieda); Cindy Daly (Cora); Deirdre Berthrong (Thonda); Anson Downes (Ernest); Tory Stevens (Kenny); Edie McClurg (Helen); Cameron DePalma (Boy on Bicycle).

CREW: United Artists Presents a Paul Monash Production of a Brian DePalma film, *Carrie*. *Art Directors:* William Kenney, Jack Fisk. *Music:* Pino Donaggio. *Director of Photography:* Mario Tosi. *Associate Producer:* Louise A. Stroller. *Editor:* Paul Hirsch. *Based on a Novel by:* Stephen King. *Screenplay:* Lawrence D. Cohen. *Produced by:* Paul Monash. *Directed by:* Brian DePalma. *Costume Designer:* Rosanna Norton. *Stunt Coordinator:* Richard Zelker. *Casting:* Harriet B. Helberg. *Special Effects:* Gregory M. Auer. *Sets by:* “get set.” *First Assistant Director:* Donald Hertzner. *Make-up:* Wesley Dawn. *Hairstylist:* Adele Taylor. *Costumer:* Agnes Tyson. *Script Supervisor:* Hanna Scheel. *Set Decorator:* Robert Gould. *Property Master:* Gary Seybert. *Sound Mixer:* Bertil Hallberg. *Sound Editor:* Dan Sable. *Music Supervisor:* Michael Arciaga. *Music*

Conducted by: Natale Massara. *Lyrics for "Carrie" by:*
Merrit Malloy and sung by: Katie Irving. *M.P.A.A.*
Rating: R. *Running Time:* 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Carrie White, a young teenager at Bates High School, is the girl that all the kids love to tease. She is plain, strange, a bit simple, and an inadequate teammate in gym class. After one particularly embarrassing game of volleyball in phys-ed, Carrie hits the showers. A bad day gets worse when Carrie starts her period for the first time, and does not understand the nature of or the reason for the blood flowing from her most sensitive spot. Panicked and fearful she is dying, a naked and bloody Carrie runs through the girls' locker room begging for help. She is met only by derisive laughter as her nasty classmates throw tampons and other feminine products at her. Mrs. Collins, the gym coach, stops the behavior and tends to Carrie even as something odd occurs: a lamp above the shower blows up, as if in response to the cruelty of the teenagers.

Carrie is sent home from school by the callous school principal who cannot seem to remember her name (he calls her "Cassie"), and Mrs. Collins assembles the girls who were so rotten to her. She sentences them all to lengthy athletic detention, and warns that any failure to do as told will result in the students losing prom privileges. One girl, Sue Snell, feels guilty about her actions and decides to make things up to Carrie. Another girl, the cruel Chrissie Hargenson, has just the opposite stance. She blames Carrie for the detention, and forfeits her prom privileges by challenging Mrs. Collins. Later, Chris plots revenge against Carrie White.

If Carrie's school life is bad, her home life is worse. She lives in an old house with her crazy mother, a religious fanatic who prays at all hours of the day, believes sex is a sin and that all people, including her innocent teenage daughter, are sinners. Mrs. White blames Carrie for having her menstrual period: she feels it is a sign from God that Carrie is the worst sinner of all. As usual, Carrie tolerates her mother's zealot-like ways, but something strange happens again. Alone in her room, Carrie finds she can break her mirror just by concentrating on it.

The next day at school, Carrie goes to the library and researches psychic phenomena. She learns, to her astonishment, that she is

capable of telekinesis: the extraordinary ability to move objects across distances without actually touching them.

Meanwhile, Sue Snell has not forgotten her atrocious behavior in gym class, and plans to do good for Carrie White. She asks her handsome boyfriend, Tommy Ross, to ask Carrie to the prom so the girl will feel included. Tommy is bewildered by the request but does as his girlfriend asks. It helps, he supposes, that odd Carrie White expressed a fondness for a poem he shared in English class one day. Though Carrie first rejects Tommy's offer, fearing another trick from the cruel girls, she ultimately accepts when Tommy's interest seems genuine. Unfortunately, Carrie's mother throws a fit when she realizes that her sinning daughter is planning to go out with a boy. She forbids Carrie to go to the prom, and Carrie finally stands up for herself. She utilizes telekinesis to challenge her mother, and Mrs. White is temporarily bewildered by the strange power. On the night of the prom, Mrs. White promises herself that she will no longer suffer "a witch" in her house, and plots to kill her own daughter.



A blood-soaked Carrie (Sissy Spacek) returns home after an exciting prom night, in *Carrie* (1976).

The evening of the prom starts out promisingly. Tommy has found, to his delight, that Carrie is a nice girl with whom he has rapport. Their evening together is not one of false fronts, but of genuine conversation and friendship. It seems that Sue's plan to bring Carrie into the high school mainstream is working splendidly. Sadly, Carrie's happiness is not to be long-lived. Chris Hargenson and her thuggish boyfriend, Billy Nolan, have plotted a terrible revenge against her. When Carrie and Tommy are elected prom queen and king, Chris's plan comes to fruition. A bucket of pig's blood rests on

the rafter above the stage, and when Carrie is crowned, Chris pulls a string that brings the blood pouring down on poor Carrie. Traumatized by the incident, and believing that those around her are laughing at her plight, Carrie's telekinetic powers go wild. In a matter of minutes, she kills every single student, teacher and administrator at the prom, and burns down the school gym where the event is held.

Outside the school, Chris and Billy try to run down the bloody prom queen with Billy's hot rod, but Carrie strikes again, using her psychic powers to roll the car and make it explode.

Devastated by the evening's outcome, a sullen Carrie—still in bloody prom dress—returns home. After a quick bath, Carrie is attacked by her mother, who still believes she is doing God's work. Carrie retaliates, levitating kitchen knives and causing them to fly across the room into Mrs. White's body. Pinned to the wall in the pose of the crucifixion, Mrs. White expires. Then, without warning, the house starts to crumble—perhaps a result of Carrie's powers gone wild, or perhaps evidence of a higher power. As the house folds in on itself, Carrie is killed.

Sometime later, Sue Snell, the sole survivor of the Bates High School massacre, dreams of a visit to Carrie White's grave. As she lays a bouquet of flowers on the ground, Carrie's bloody hand reaches up from Hell to drag her down...

COMMENTARY: Brian DePalma matches flashy style with solid plotting and characterization in *Carrie*, a tense thriller that captures the angst of adolescence and the high school experience. Many adolescents feel alone in their lives, without anybody to understand them. That is Carrie's plight. Her mother is a religious monster, and the other teens are too busy teasing Carrie to establish a genuine connection to her. Carrie is very much alone and trying to answer questions about her life. Why is her body changing? What does it mean that she is becoming an adult woman? Why is she so hated by others? These are the questions to which she seeks answers, and the film takes it one step beyond that too. Carrie is a special girl, and with the onset of her menstrual cycle something else has come: paranormal abilities. The picture explodes when Carrie finally strikes back against all those who have injured her, using that

deadly power. In one sense the film is wish fulfillment. There are very few teens who wouldn't like to exact a little healthy revenge against school bullies and tormentors. On another level, the film is a nightmare about alone-ness and the quest for acceptance. However one chooses to look at it, DePalma has taken the Stephen King material to extraordinary heights with his keen visual sense.

Near the commencement of *Carrie*, DePalma's camera glides through a locker room. The steam from the showers softens the image, and gives the impression of a dream or fantasy. As the camera moves constantly to the right, we see beautiful naked young bodies frolicking. It is an erotic image of wood nymphs at play, or some equally far-fetched "fantasy." But then the camera finds Carrie in the shower, her back to the audience, as she showers. Again, DePalma's emphasis on the erotic is noteworthy. He shoots close up of the shower-head spraying water, the lathery soap, and Carrie's face as she touches her breasts and stomach. Some may question this lingering on nubile young flesh, but it is important that DePalma note the full extent of this character's womanhood. Though shy and awkward, she is beautiful, and stepping into sexual maturity.

Then, suddenly, comes the blood from between Carrie's legs to mar the scene. That menstrual blood is the "price" for the erotic, the cost of sexual maturity, and it terrifies Carrie because she does not understand it. No one, especially her prudish mother, has bothered to explain to her that a physical price—this terrible flowing—comes with the process of growing up.

From that point on, the dreaminess is over, and the film descends into the harsh reality of high school life—the teasing, the bullying, the peer pressure, the taunts and the humiliations. Here, girls throw tampons and pads at Carrie, and DePalma charts the contrast to the "soothing" dream of the shower with deranged close-ups of Carrie's smiling, laughing tormentors. In revealing these girls as cruel animals, the audience is led to understand Carrie's feeling of isolation. The scene is also critical because it observes Carrie's "psychic" maturity (to go along with the menstruation). A lamp bulb "shatters" spontaneously during the crisis ... and that is the first stirring of Carrie's anger and rebellion.

The only bright light in Carrie's school life is her "affection" for Tommy Ross. A filmmaker that understands the grammar of cinema, DePalma connects these characters visually the first time they are together. In English class, Tommy (Katt) is highlighted in the foreground, and Carrie (Spacek) is seen in the background of the same shot. He is paramount, she is almost an afterthought, but they are nonetheless noted as being together in the same composition. The staging not only reveals that there is "something" between the characters, it reflects Carrie's own view of self. Tommy is "big" and center stage, while she is "small" and far from attention.

The remainder of the film is a torturous build-up to Carrie's moment of explosive rage. Chris (Allen) and Nolan (Travolta) plot a terrible revenge, and the audience fears for Carrie. The film spends much time on her miserable home life with a zealous mother, and again, the audience is led to wonder just how much this poor girl should be forced to endure. Then, there is that moment of hope as Tommy and Carrie develop a meaningful relationship. DePalma fools the audience with this aspect of the film, letting the hope linger that maybe, just maybe, Carrie has found a kindred spirit that will allow her to "join" the rest of the world and vanquish her intense loneliness. Though that is not to be, DePalma plays out that alternative in agonizing detail.

The prom is surely the centerpiece of the film. DePalma's camera prowls the party, and Mrs. Collins (Buckley) shares a tender story with Carrie about her own prom. This is the kind of human, personal story most horror films wouldn't stop to record. But DePalma is playing a nasty trick. He's building to the idea that Carrie is going to have a beautiful experience too. He wants the audience to wonder if Carrie's prom will be the joyous, great memory Collins speaks so highly of. To that end, DePalma's camera circles Tommy and Carrie as they dance together. At first the spinning is dreamy, like the opening locker room sequence, but soon the rotating is out of control, faster and faster, and the audience is thus warned that the night is not going to go well.

When DePalma's "eye," the lens, then follows P. J. Soles to the stage, and the camera banks up into the rafters to the pig's blood,

the audience knows the trap is set, and it is only a matter of time before horror dawns. But DePalma is still not finished yet. He provides Carrie and Tommy another short-lived moment of victory. They are crowned king and queen of the prom. This revelation is shot in slow-motion photography, and Spacek plays the moment with a sense of utter happiness and joy. Her joy is innocent and unknowing, and hence the suspense comes in. The audience knows what is going to happen, but can do nothing to stop it. It is forced to endure, again in slow motion photography, the deafening applause of the audience as Tommy and Carrie ascend the stage.

These moments of victory (and ascension) are periodically intercut with the bucket of blood as it shakes above the stage, and above Carrie. This is nail biting stuff, especially when Sue (Amy Irving) detects the bucket too late. She runs for it, but then the blood is spilled, and it douses Carrie.

When Carrie is crowned in pig's blood, it is a specific reflection of the opening sequence, wherein Carrie is horrified by the flowing of her vaginal blood. Her mother tells her that blood represents sin. "First comes the blood, and then comes the sin." So, imagine Carrie's horror at being covered in this pig's blood in public! She no doubt believes that by loving Tommy, she has sinned, and again brought the blood. It's a powerful moment, and this is one horror movie that understands blood can be utilized for more than shock effect.

Yet, oddly, the pig's blood heralds Carrie's final walk to adulthood. When she began her period, her powers "burst" with the explosion of the lamp in the shower. Timed with the increase of blood on stage, Carrie's powers come to full flower, and she uses them to terrible effect. Not surprisingly, DePalma depicts Carrie's psychic force with one of his favorite techniques, heavily favored in 1973's *Sisters*. He deploys split-screen photography to depict the cause and effect in the same moment. In the left image in the screen, Carrie turns her head. Instantaneously, on the right side, we see the psychic effect of that turn—something catches fire, or something explodes.

DePalma goes nuts in this climax, filling both sides of the screen with a prom apocalypse the likes of which the world has never

seen. All of Carrie's suppressed rage is released in a firestorm of violence. It is powerful, and if truth is told, the audience is on her side, especially when she dispatches Chris and Nolan, and her own twisted mother. The film has been so effective in charting Carrie's humiliation that the audience is almost frothing at the mouth to see the baddies get their just deserts. The problem is that Carrie goes beyond the bounds of the sane at this point. She destroys friends (Collins) and enemies alike because she perceives they are laughing at her. The innocent and the guilty fall to her power and that, in the end, makes Carrie a monster.

The final "sting" in the tale acknowledges that fact. Shot in dreamy, misty slow motion, Sue deposits flowers on Carrie's grave only to be grabbed by Carrie's groping, burned claw. Even the innocent must be afraid of Carrie, because she has lost control of her hate. This powerful shock ending has been repeated often, but it has rarely been done as effectively as DePalma's staging of it in *Carrie*.

Ultimately, what one takes out of this story is a sense of frustration with a world that allows good people to be tormented, and turned into monsters themselves. Carrie was so harried, so put upon by everyone in her life that she finally retaliated with the very force and hatred she despised in others. Did the members of the trench coat mafia, one wonders, feel the same way when they opened fire on their classmates? Were they so besieged by feelings of self-loathing and loneliness that their anger could only find expression in violence and bullets? That's a question that may never be answered, but *Carrie* very responsibly looks at the way vulnerable kids can sometimes fall through the cracks of parental and public guidance to find themselves lost. How they respond to their predicament is just a matter of degrees. When armed with psychic powers, Carrie didn't need guns, but the story wouldn't have been that different if she had gone to the prom with an AK-47. Society's failing made her a victim, and she finally had enough of it.

Though his name is misspelled in the trailer for *Carrie* as "Steven King," Stephen King is the "other" artist behind *Carrie*, and it is safe to say he has tapped into the volatility and fears of the adolescent years. King has a way of seeing the underside of human existence, whether it is the small town relationships (*Needful Things*, *Salem's Lot*), creativity (*The Dark Half*), science (*The Stand*) or the

microcosm of high school, in *Carrie*. His world is one where teens revel in cruelty, and consequently one must wonder how closely King identifies with Carrie. One thing is for certain, his protagonist is played with great sensitivity by Sissy Spacek. The actress has the stance of a delicate bird, her hands often upturned like wings. She is fragile, but dangerous too. Spacek's characterization is successful because her humanity never gets lost in the pyrotechnics.

Stephen King and Brian DePalma are a fine creative match because both artists tend to play their stories in extremes. King's characters are often so extreme in their actions and violence that they border on caricatures. Likewise, DePalma is so obsessive about film style that he too pushes the envelope of what is considered "good taste." In this case, King's well-written material and DePalma's brilliant visualization combine to make a memorable essay on teen angst and violence. Each artist complements the other, and the result is a classic horror film that speaks to the heart as loudly as it appeals to the mind.

LEGACY: *Carrie* is an acknowledged horror classic today, and it began the acting career of Academy Award winner Sissy Spacek. The film spawned numerous imitators (such as 1977's *Ruby*, and 1978's *Jennifer*), and there was even a short-lived play of the Stephen King material on Broadway in the mid-'90s. An official sequel didn't come until *The Rage: Carrie 2* in 1999, with Amy Irving the only original cast member to re-enlist. Perhaps *Carrie*'s real success rests on what it proved to producers: people would pay, and pay big, to see Stephen King's work adapted to the screen. After *Carrie*, King-inspired material deluged the silver screen, including (but not limited to) Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* (1982), John Carpenter's *Christine* (1983), Rob Reiner's *Misery* (1990), George Romero's *The Dark Half* (1991), and Tobe Hooper's *The Mangler* (1995).

Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders (1976) * * ½

Cast & Crew

CAST: David Hemmings (Marcus Daly); Daria Nicolodi (Gianna Brezzi); Gabriele Lavia (Carlo);

Marcha Meril (Helga Ulmann); Eros Pagni (Calcabrin); Giuliana Calundra (Amanda Righetti); Clauco Mauri (Giordani); Clara Calamai (Martha/Madre di Carlo); Piero Mazzinghi (Bardhi); With: Aldo Bonamano, Liana Del Balzo, Vittorio Fanfoni, Dante Fioretti, Geraldine Hooper, Lacopo Mariani, Furio Meniconi, Fulvio Mingozzi, Lorenzo Piani, Salvatore Puntille, Piero Vida, Nicolette Elma.

CREW: A Directors Mahler, Leah J. Marks/
Radcliffe Associates Ltd. Feature Film. A film by
Dario Argento. *Written by:* Dario Argento,
Bernardino Zapponi. *Executive Producer:* Claudio
Argento. *Director of Photography:* Luigi Kuveiller.
Production Design: Giuseppe Bassan. *Film Editor:*
Franco Fraticelli. *Music:* "Giorgio Gaslini and the
Goblins," *played by:* the Goblins. A Seda Spettacoli
Production. *Directed by:* Dario Argento. *Director of
Production:* Carlo Cucchi. *Production Secretary:*
Cesare Jacolucci. *Camera Operator:* Ubaldo Terzano.
Assistant Camera Operators: Antonio Annunziata,
Antonio Tonti. *Special Effects:* Germano Natali,
Carlo Rambaldi. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:*
100 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: At the European Congress on Parapsychology, a beautiful psychic, Helga Ulmann, receives strong impressions that a vicious murderer is in the audience. Helga announces this fact, causing shock and panic, and exposing herself to the psychotic. That night, Helga is murdered in her apartment by the very murderer she tried to expose to the world.

Pianist Marcus Daly, Helga's neighbor, witnesses the murder and catches a fleeting glimpse of the perpetrator. Realizing he is a target now too, Marcus sets out to find the killer before the killer finds him. He talks to his gay friend, Carlo, who was standing outside his apartment at the time of the murder. He also meets Martha, Carlo's mother.

Before long, the killer arrives at Marcus Daly's apartment and attempts to kill him, auguring the arrival by broadcasting a strange

nursery rhyme. Marcus survives the attack, and a psychic friend of Helga's suggests that he check out the library for supernatural stories concerning that nursery rhyme. Marcus does so, and finds a story called "The House of the Screaming Child," which features the odd music prominently. Marcus resolves to track down the author, Amanda Righetti, but she is soon killed in her apartment ... scalded to death in the bathtub by the murderer.

Marcus and a beautiful reporter, Gianna, continue to investigate the series of murders. They find the dark house that Righetti wrote about, and find a corpse hidden behind a wall. They soon realize someone they know is hiding a deadly secret. At first, that person is thought to be Carlo, but in fact, it is his insane mother, Martha. She killed his father years ago (at Christmas) and then hid the body. Since then, Carlo has been protecting her. Martha was forced to kill again when Helga learned the truth about her, but Marcus fights the killer to the death, and she is strangled as her necklace catches in the door of an elevator.

COMMENTARY: Many horror critics and writers don't care for the work of Italian director Dario Argento. Yet the man has a large circle of rabid fans that proclaim him a genre genius. Who is right? Well, this author is a huge admirer of *Suspiria*, a really wicked and unnerving supernatural picture, but less so of some of his other work, like *Creepers* (1984) and *Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders*. The typical argument against Argento is that his films make little sense in any dimension, from character psychology and dialogue to plot development. Contrarily, the argument for Argento as a great genre artist recognizes that he has a gift for fostering disturbing imagery and terrifying mood.

Probably both sides are right to some degree. Argento's films are mostly nonsensical (at least to English-speaking audiences), but the feelings of fear he evokes are surely universal. The greatest compliment this author can pay to Argento is the mode in which he views the artist's films. He won't do so when he's alone in the house. Argento's films are too creepy, and their horrific imagery lingers long after a viewing. Like Hannibal Lecter, Dario Argento is one guy you don't want playing around in your head.

Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders is a loosely connected tapestry of

incredible horror imagery, punctuated by moments of terrible plotting, atrocious dialogue and confusing scenarios. So, one really has to pick and choose which is more important, believability or the “gut.” For the intellectual would surely laugh at Argento’s failed attempts at psychological depth, while, if tuned into his own feelings, the self-same intellectual would acknowledge deep discomfort at the action on screen.

On to the bad first: the plot opens with a brilliantly staged sequence in which a member of a psychic discussion panel realizes a killer is in the audience, and announces such. On a visual and emotional level the scene is tense. But, would you announce that a killer is in your audience, and then do nothing about it? Here’s a notion: if you finger a murderer, don’t go home to your apartment alone after publicly revealing your knowledge.

This scene could have and should have played a different way. The auditorium could have been closed and no audience members would have been allowed to leave the room until the police interviewed everybody. That’s the world of logic and reality. Alas, that is not the world of *Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders* (or “Don’t Hack the Piano Player,” as this author’s wife re-named it...), and nothing so reasonable occurs. Instead, the psychic reveals her knowledge, goes home, and is promptly murdered. Who didn’t see that coming?

If that isn’t bad enough, Daly is an eyewitness to that murder, and the newspaper promptly reports his name and the fact that he saw the killer. Of course, this publicity subsequently makes him the next likely victim. In a rational world, the newspaper would not have released Daly’s name so the killer could have an easy time offing him. In a rational world, that information would only have been released so as to lay a trap for the killer. The police would have fostered the release of such information, set up a sting, and been ready to catch the murderer. None of those things occur either.

With a degree of cleverness, the dialogue might have addressed some of these issues. But the dialogue is ridiculous. “Who did it?” one character asks. “A maniac,” another responds helpfully. It’s all very brain-dead stuff. Maybe something really is lost in the translation. Argento also outsmarts himself by making the

photographer/reporter Gianna a possible suspect in the crimes. She's aggressive, weird, and altogether suspicious. One feels that in her conversations with the pianist, Argento is making a specific point since their dialogue results in a psycho-battle of the sexes. Which is the cleverer gender? Which is the dumber? Women are weaker, gentler, according to the pianist, but immediately one has the feeling he's going to be proven wrong. Of course, he is, and the murderer is revealed to be a woman. But the culprit isn't Gianna. She's just an awkward mouthpiece for the film's philosophy, a red herring. But, for all the sense the conclusion makes, she could have been the killer.

But amidst all of the bad stuff ... there is also much promise, and *Deep Red* is filled with pulse pounding, horrifying moments. There is a frightening moment when the killer hides in a closet and the only part of her body visible is a stark white eyeball. That is really startling, and creepy. Check your closets tonight, before you go to bed. The scene with a knitting needle (a weapon later adopted by Michael Myers in *Halloween*) is also pretty good. The inference is clear: Argento knows how to create provocative images, and he understands how to get adrenaline pumping, but how his characters talk, motivate themselves, relate and move seems amateurish. It's great that he has the killer whisper in *voix haute*—that's chill inducing—and the parapsychologist's death late in the picture must be some kind of nightmare classic. A mechanical doll waddles suddenly into a room to distract the man. Then the killer jumps out from behind curtains and plants a hatchet in his neck. That mechanical thing, sliding into the room as if alive, is almost more frightening than the ensuing death sequence.

A viewer can scratch his head while watching *Deep Red* and wonder what the hell is happening, and at the same time be scared and titillated by Argento's technique and imagery. If the former is an acceptable price to pay to achieve the latter, then horror fans may want to check out *Deep Red*. But they'd be better off with *Suspiria*.

***Eaten Alive* (1976) * * ½**

Critical Reception

“At its best, the film’s lurid tone matches the evocative gloom of the EC horror comics of the ’50s, in particular the amazing swamp stories drawn by ‘Ghastly’ Graham Inglis. Otherwise it’s trite and unconvincing.”—David Pirie, *Time Out Film Guide*, page 214.

“Zero-budget schlock horror which isn’t even good exploitation.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, page 54.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Neville Brand (Judd); Mel Ferrer (Harvey Wood); Carolyn Jones (Miss Hatty); Marilyn Burns (Faye); William Finley (Roy); Stuart Whitman (Sheriff Martin); Roberta Collins (Clara); Kyle Richards (Angie); Robert Englund (Buck); Crystin Sinclair (Libby Wood); Janus Blyth (Lynette); Betty Cole (Ruby); Sig Sakowicz (Deputy Girth); Ronald W. David (Country Boy); David Hayward (the Cowboy); David “Goat” Carson (“Marlo”); Lincoln Kibbee (First Guy in Bar); James Galanis (Second Guy in Bar); Dog (Scuffy); With: Tarja Leena Halinen, Caren White, Valerie Lukeart, Jerome Reichart.

CREW: A Virgo International Pictures Release, a Mars Production. Mardi Rustam presents *Eaten Alive*. *Executive Producer:* Mohammed Rustam. *Associate Producers:* Samir Rustam, Larry Huly, Robert Kanto. *Co-produced by:* Alvin L. Fast. *Music Composed, Conducted and Arranged by:* Tobe Hooper, Wayne Bell. *Written by:* Alvin L. Fast, and Mardi Rustam. *Adapted for the Screen by:* Kim Henkel. *Produced by:* Mardi Rustam. *Directed by:* Tobe Hooper. *Director of Photography:* Robert Caramico. *Editor:* Michael Brown. *Casting:* Eddie Morse. *Sound Effects:* Echo Film Services, Bill Manger. *Music Editor:* Lee Osborne. *Assistant Editor:*

Andy Ruben. *Second Assistant Directors*: Jeff Kibbee, Laurie Lawless. *Script Supervisor*: John D'Amato. *Second Unit Cameraman*: Jack Beckett. *Art Director/Set Designer*: Marshall Reed. *Set Decorator*: Mike Wiegant. *Wardrobe*: Greg Tittinger, Jane Manbach. *Make-up/Hair*: Craig Reardon, Beth Rogers. *Special Effects*: A & A. *Stunt Coordinatory*: Von Deminy. *Radio Songs by*: Rick Casual, Eddie Barles, Cam King, Lisa Casady, Jay White, Rick Smith, Oscar De Leon, Napoleon Colombo, Al Bolt. *Mechanical Alligator and Crocodile Furnished by*: Bob Matthey. *Dog Trainer*: Lou Schumacher. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 88 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A hooker at Miss Hatty's brothel in Louisiana protests when Buck, a regular customer, pays to have anal sex with her. Miss Hatty throws the hooker out, but a friendly domestic gives the girl some cash and instructs her to stay at the Starlight, a local fleabag hotel. The hooker rents a room there from the strange clerk, a war veteran named Judd. When he learns she is a whore, he kills her with a pitchfork and feeds her to his pet alligator in the swamp.

Sometime later, a family on a trip stops by at the establishment. The family's pet poodle is eaten by the alligator, and the little daughter, Angie, goes into shock. When the father, Roy, attempts to kill the murderous alligator, Judd kills him with a scythe. Roy manages to shoot Judd in the foot before dying, but Judd has a false leg and is otherwise uninjured. Judd ties up Faye, Roy's wife, and attempts to kill the little girl. Angie hides under the hotel foundation, and evades capture.

The same night, a businessman, Mr. Wood, and his grown daughter, Libby, come seeking the dead prostitute, Libby's estranged sister, at Judd's place. The father requests the help of Sheriff Martin, and the law enforcement official takes him to see Miss Hatty. The madam claims never to have seen Mr. Wood's daughter. A despondent Mr. Woods returns to the hotel while Libby dates the sheriff. When Mr. Wood hears Angie crying nearby, Judd slices him with his scythe.

Sheriff Martin takes Libby to a local bar, where redneck Buck is busy raising hell. Martin runs him off, and Buck takes his underage

girlfriend to the Starlight Hotel. When they make love there, Judd is aroused, and makes advances toward Faye. Buck hears her screams and tries to save her, but Judd pushes Buck into the swamp and the gator gets him. Judd chases Buck's girl through the swamp, but she escapes.

Libby returns to the hotel and rescues Faye and her daughter, Angie. Judd pursues the women, but is eventually eaten by his own alligator.

COMMENTARY: *Eaten Alive* (also known as: *Death Trap*, *Horror Hotel*, *Legend of the Bayou*, *Murder on the Bayou* and *Starlight Slaughter*), is a dive into sleaze. The film, directed by Tobe Hooper two years after *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* took America by storm, is cheap, lurid and garish ... yet oddly, those are exactly the right touches for this material. It's seedy to the max, and one again feels that Tobe Hooper finds value in de-glamorizing the horror genre. There are no European castles here, merely a filthy run-down hotel on the edge of a forgotten bayou. It's all a bit depressing, and one feels that in the final analysis, Hooper gets carried away with the cesspool of his setting and characters, somehow losing the film's ability to entertain. This isn't a movie to watch for fun.

The primary setting of *Eaten Alive* is a run-down, out of the way motel. It is run not by the insane Norman Bates, but the equally wacky (and much less personable) Judd. The hotel is constructed, interestingly, on a soundstage doubling as an exterior. It is not particularly "real" looking, but it is a stylish bit of architecture, and an effective locale for the film. The setting looks like Tennessee Williams by way of William Girdler, and that's suitable for the material.

The interior of the Starlight is a masterpiece of rot, a decaying, rotten place on its last legs. There are filthy sofas, cracking wallpaper on the walls, grimy lamp shades and dirty brown, leaking toilets. It's an absolutely disgusting habitat, and this is definitely one movie where you don't want to know how long it's been since the sheets on the bed were changed.

One can sense from the hard-core nature of the decor that the audience's feelings will not be preserved in this picture. That idea is

hammered home in the opening sequence. One of the first shots of the film is a close-up of Englund's jeans and crotch. Down goes his zipper, and he utters the immortal line "The name's Buck and I'm raring to fuck." Englund's menacing crotch is then super-imposed over the chastened hooker's concerned face. From there, Englund, playing a redneck skeez, elicits anal sex ("turn over and get on your knees... I'm gonna ride you like you've never been rid before" he enthuses). When she refuses to acquiesce to this action, there is a disturbing near-rape scene. If that isn't difficult enough to sit through, the film proceeds to a puppy's death in the jaws of an alligator. Then a child is relentlessly pursued by a psychotic. Then, in a truly nauseating (but interesting...) scene, remembering that murder can be messy, a scythe sticks in Mr. Wood's neck and he can't get it out.

As a critic, it is easy to admire Hooper's *modus operandi* in *Eaten Alive*. He wants no glamour, no easy ways out. Instead, he wants to depict insanity in a seedy, out of the way place, not unlike the family farmhouse of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. It is interesting how he uses country music to underscore the "redneck" settings, and the sexual politics among the characters are mildly interesting. The problem seems to be twofold. First off, no self-respecting person, no matter how desperate, would stay the night in a hellhole like this one. And gee, it sure gets a lot of business in one night, doesn't it? But, movies are inherently flawed in this manner all the time ... it's called dramatic license.

The more serious problem is that Hooper may have gone too far in depicting unlikable people. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was notable for its lack of any real heroes too. Franklin was a shrill whiner, and the other teens were pretty vapid. Still, the audience wanted Marilyn Burns to escape. Just by the very nature of what she was forced to endure, the audience sympathized with her. In *Eaten Alive*, Hooper does not distinguish much between his "monsters" (like Judd) and the rest of humanity. Buck is a thug and rapist. Faye's husband is a self-hating failure. Mr. Wood is obsessed beyond reason, and Sheriff Martin is hapless and useless. Everybody (except the child) seems to be insane in one dimension or another. Neville Brand's babbling also grows tiring really fast, though in an odd way his misshapen monologues reveal some of his character.

The real test for any horror film is this: is it scary? Well, *Eaten Alive* gets only minor approval on that note. The film is hypnotic in its sleazy way once the viewer accepts the off-beat rhythm of the piece, but it is not “intense” or scary in the same way that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Last House on the Left* or *The Hills Have Eyes* are. It wants to play out in the same genre, the “savage” cinema wherein moral taboos are shattered, but it is an opera in a minor key. The chases through the swamp evoke Leatherface’s pursuit of Burns through a thicket in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, but it feels like little more than a visual quote here. The film is disgusting and disturbing, and maybe a little scary. But it’s no masterpiece.

Yet it is authentically sleazy, and one just has to ask why? What was the purpose? Why wallow in this sewer without giving some sense of hope, or at least perspective? The randomness of madness is a perennial Tobe Hooper theme, and how he balances happenstance and a heightened “Ed Gein” sense of horror is interesting, if not illuminating. There might have been something to this indecipherable, inexplicable plunge into insanity and death if it had just a bit more meaning, or perspective, or even irony. Hooper is a witty, thoughtful director of horror, but here he seems caught up in the cracked wallpaper and the other (admittedly satisfactory) grungy touches. Rumors are that Hooper was taken off the film early in production, and that Carolyn Jones “unofficially” directed the remainder of the picture. That may be why it doesn’t quite gel. There’s a lot of disturbing material and potential in *Eaten Alive*, but it ultimately is nothing more than a low-budget gaze into human degradation. That could be a worthy destination in a movie if the director expresses a worthwhile perspective either humorous, tragic, or nihilistic. But if there’s no light at the end of the sewer, who wants to jump in it for 90 minutes?

***Embryo* (1976) * ***

Critical Reception

“...this tax-shelter entry was a disservice to the sci-fi field and to the once strong marquee name, Rock Hudson ... an embarrassing updated variation of *The Bride of Frankenstein*.”—James Robert Parish

and Michael R. Pitts, *The Great Science Fiction Pictures*, 1977, pages 111–112.

“The relationship between the two leads is well set-up, but once Hudson sets about launching her [Carerra] into society, the film moves inexorably in an all too predictable direction... Ladd as Hudson’s jealous housekeeper helps generate the sexual tension that is essential and which Nelson only too quickly allows to dissipate....”—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 328.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Rock Hudson (Dr. Paul Holliston); Diane Ladd (Martha Douglas); Ann Schedeen (Helen); John Elerick (Gordon); Vincent Baggetta (Collier); Jack Colving (Dr. James Wiston); Roddy McDowall (Frank Riley); Barbara Carrera (Victoria); Dr. Joyce Brothers (Herself); Dick Winslow (John Forbes); Ken Washington (Dr. Brink); Lina Raymond (Janet Novak); Sharri Zak (Nurse); Joyce Spitz (Trainer); George Sawaya (Policeman); Hank Robinson (Ambulance Attendant); Chuck Comisky (Fireman).

CREW: Sandy Howard Productions Presents Rock Hudson in *Embryo*. *Screenplay by:* Anita Doohan and Jack W. Thomas. *Story by:* Jack W. Thomas. *Produced by:* Anita Hoohan and Arnold H. Orgolini. *Directed by:* Ralph Nelson. *Executive Producer:* Sandy Howard. *Director of Photography:* Fred J. Koenekamp. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Gil Melle. *Casting:* Lea Stalmaster. *Production Design:* Joseph Alves, Jr. *Set Decoration:* Philip Abramson. *Make-up Design and Embryos:* Dan Striepeke, Frank Griffin, John Chambers, Ed Butterworth. *Special Effects:* Roy Arbogast. *Film Editor:* John A. Martinelli. *Associate Producer:* Michael S. Glick. *Technical Advisor:* Charles R. Brinkman, M.D. *Animal Trainer:* Cindy James Cullen. *Costume*

Design: Moss Mabry. *Production Design:* Chip Fowler.
Unit Production Manager: Michael S. Glick. *Second Assistant Director:* Gary Credle. *Script Supervisor:* Bonnie Prendergast. *Sound Mixer:* Bud Alper.
Wardrobe: Sandra Berke. *Make-up:* Dan Striepeke, Mark Reedall. *Hairstylist:* Lynn Dee Kail. *Gaffer:* Gene Stout. *Key Grip:* John Murray. *Stunt Coordinator:* Everett Creach. *Transportation Coordinator:* James Brubaker. *Assistant Film Editor:* Scott C. Tyler. *Location Auditor:* Renee Brown.
Sound Effects: Nelman-Tillar Associates. Produced in Association with Astral Bellevue Pate Ltd. Filmed in Panavision. Locations by Cinemobile. *Color:* Deluxe. *Title Design:* Phill Norman. A Plura Service Company Feature. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 97 minutes.

P.O.V.

“The film you are about to see is not all science fiction. It is based upon a medical technology which currently exists for fetal growth outside the womb. It could be a possibility tomorrow ... or today.”—Charles R. Brinkman, M.D. (from the opening card in *Embryo*).

SYNOPSIS: Scientist Paul Holliston accidentally hits a dog with his car on his way home one night. Still feeling guilty over the death of his wife in a car accident some two years earlier, Holliston takes the dog to his personal lab to operate on him. The dog is pregnant, and Holliston performs surgery to save one of the developing pups. With the mother dog fatally wounded, Paul injects the surviving fetus with a hormone that accelerates growth. In two days the dog has grown to six weeks of age. Within a week, the dog is a full-grown, one-year-old dog with an unnaturally high intelligence.

Holliston's success with the dog spurs him to repeat the experiment, this time with a human embryo. He visits his physician friend Jim at a local hospital to discuss his plan. The doctor arranges for Paul to acquire a 14-week-old fetus with no chance of independent

survival. Paul takes the fetus home, and injects it with placental lactagen, his special growth hormone. Amazingly, the fetus grows into a fully developed infant within one month. Despite discontinuance of the hormone, the baby continues to grow: one year per day. After several desperate days, the growth is finally retarded by an addictive drug, Methitrexate. Now Paul is left with a 25-year-old woman that knows nothing of the world. He institutes a subconscious learning program, and soon awakens his “creation.”

Victoria, Paul’s patient, is an intelligent, beautiful woman. Paul teaches her to read, while his sister-in-law Martha, and his son and daughter-in-law leave on a trip. With Victoria his sole responsibility, Paul teaches her all the rudiments of human life. He finds her brilliant, but emotionally retarded. Significantly, Victoria reads the Bible and finds it illogical.

Soon, Paul takes Victoria out to view the world and acquaint her with humankind. He sets up a false identity for her as his research assistant. At a party, he introduces her to the family, including Paul’s pregnant daughter-in-law, Helen. At the party, Victoria humiliates a pompous socialite by defeating him in chess. Soon after her debut, Victoria wants to experience something else: sex. She and Paul make love, but then Victoria gets sick, and her rapid aging resumes. She hides this fact from Paul, and sets out to cure herself. A computer analysis suggests that the only way to stop this aging is to transplant the pituitary gland of a five-month-old fetus. Victoria, devoid of morality, sets out to steal what she needs to survive. Unfortunately, Helen is at just the right stage of her pregnancy, and Victoria abducts her to perform the operation.

Paul and his son, Gordon, race to stop Victoria, but arrive too late. Victoria has performed a Cesarean section on Helen and removed the fetus. In a violent tussle in the lab, Victoria kills Gordon, and flees. While she continues to age, Paul pursues her. They end up at the shore of a lake and Paul strangles the elderly Victoria. The police arrive and prevent Paul from murdering his creation. Worse, Victoria—near death—reveals that she is pregnant with Paul’s child.

COMMENTARY: *Embryo* is a modern-day Frankenstein story in which a good, smart man is driven into creating a monster by his obsessions with science and death. Interestingly, the monster of

Embryo is the beautiful Barbara Carrera! Other than that unique twist, this is a low budget “science goes awry” horror film that is mostly without distinction. Roddy McDowall shows up for a cameo role as a bitchy chess expert, and Dr. Joyce Brothers appears as herself, but these are quickly passing “spikes” in a slow-moving film. A stolid Rock Hudson performs adequately as Holliston, the man who “plays God,” and pays the price for his trespasses.

Rock plays the Victor Frankenstein role in *Embryo*, a scientist who is obsessed with his death (because of his wife’s death) and is desperate to extend life. His motives are pure at first, but his obsessive need to “save lives” leads to egomania. In creating Victoria, Hudson hopes to achieve a level of immortality for himself, but he makes many bad choices in raising this child of science. Ultimately, his “fast growth” hormone is not able to grant his “monster,” Victoria, the one thing she requires most to survive in the human world: a sense of morality. And perhaps that is no surprise, since Holliston’s morals wouldn’t stand up under much scrutiny, either. For instance, he is clearly Victoria’s father and mentor, yet Holliston has sexual intercourse with her. When that taboo is broken, Victoria starts to age and die, a not so subtle acknowledgment that they have fallen from paradise for this sin. Holliston pays the price too: his son, daughter-in-law and grandchild are all killed by Victoria in her quest to survive.

Some of this is pretty fun stuff, in an exploitative way. When first awakened, Carrera staggers around the lab half-naked in a daze, and the camera shamelessly revels in her physical beauty. There are some kinky elements to the story too, with the older man taking the younger woman under his wing, and suggesting she read the Bible. She finds it a good read, but illogical. But even the strength of the Bible couldn’t help Holliston when confronted with this lovely young thing expressing her desire to “learn” and “experience” sex with him. But these tongue-in-cheek, erotic elements ultimately don’t make the film more than a mildly enjoyable experience.

Embryo never explains, for instance, why a girl raised by Hudson from birth would speak with a heavy accent, and much of the early part of the film is dull voice-over exposition as Hudson explains his experiment at length. It’s all kind of awkward and lowbrow, when it

should be more provocative. Though there is a good scene at the end when Carrera visits a playground and contemplates the childhood she never had, her feelings are ultimately left mostly unexplored. Her morality (or lack thereof) should be the core of *Embryo*, but instead her “evil” behavior just seems like an excuse for the film to break out into violence. It is a long-standing tradition in films like these that those who “tamper in God’s domain” must receive their comeuppance, so the ending is predictable. That said, the climax is underwhelming. It is hard to imagine how the director imagined a car chase—after all the sex and science—would prove a satisfying wrap-up to the questions raised in the film.

In the 1970s, people were becoming aware of the possibilities of gene manipulation and the potential of DNA experiments. *Embryo* is an old Frankenstein-style story that tries to take advantage of those scientific developments at the same time it exploits the “new freedom” to show more sex in cinema. Those new wrinkles don’t do much, in this case, to breathe life into an oft-told tale.

Food of the Gods

CAST: Marjoe Gortner (Morgan); Pamela Franklin (Lorna); Ralph Meeker (Jack); John Cypher (Brian); Ida Lupino (Mrs. Skinner).

CREW: *Written and Directed by:* Bert I. Gordon.
Based on the Novel by: H.G. Wells. *Produced by:*
Samuel Z. Arkoff and Bert I. Gordon. *Director of*
Photography: Reginald Morris. *Film Editor:* Corky
Ehlers. *Music:* Elliot Kaplan. From American
International Productions. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.
Running Time: 88 minutes.

DETAILS: Giant animals, nourished on a strange, milky “ambrosia,” attack an all-star B cast led by Pamela Franklin (*The Legend of Hell House, And Soon the Darkness*), in this schlock masterpiece from Bert I. Gordon. The special effects are atrocious, the surprise ending a howler, and the performances overdone. Yet this is a guilty pleasure. Franklin’s dialogue, including her memorable come-on to Gortner, is especially cheesy.



Marjoe Gortner is attacked by a giant rat in *Food of the Gods* (1976).

God Told Me To

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tony Lo Bianco (Peter J. Nicholas); Sandy Dennis (Martha Nicholas); Sylvia Sidney (Miss Elizabeth Mullin); Sam Levene (Everett Lukas); Robert Drivas (David Morten); Mike Kellin (Deputy Commissioner); Richard Lynch (Bernard Phillips); Deborah Raffin (Casey Forster); John Heffernan (Bramwell); James Dixon (Detective); Harry Bellaver (Cookie); Al Fann (Detective); Lester Rawlins (Board Chairman); William Roerick (Richards); George Patterson (Zero); Walter Steele (Junkie); Alan Cauldwell (Bramwell as a youth); Robert Nichols (Fletcher); Andy Kaufman (Police Assassin); Robby Ramsen, Alex Stevens, Harry Madsen, Randy Jurgensen (Detective Squad); Sherry Steiner (Miss Phillips, as a girl); James Dukas (Doorman); Mason Adams (Obstetrician);

William Bressant (Police Officer); Armand Dahan (Fruit Vendor); Vida Taylor (Miss Mullin as a girl); Adrian James (Prostitute); Leile Martin (Nurse Jackson); Michael Pendry (Attendant); Dan Resin, Alexander Clark, Marivin Silbisher (Wall Street Executives); Harry Eno (Medical Examiner).

CREW: A Larco Production. *Photographed by:* Paul Glickman. *Sound:* Jeffrey Hayes. *Assistant Camera:* Stefan Czapsky. *Editing Staff:* Arthur Mandelberg, William J. Waters, Christopher Lebenzon, Mike Corey. *Special Make-up:* Steve Neil, Filmed with Panavision Equipment. *Music:* Frank Cordell. *Screenplay:* Larry Cohen. *Executive Producers:* Edgar J. Scherick, Daniel Blatt. *Produced and Directed by:* Larry Cohen. *Casting:* Sylvia Fay. *Production Assistants:* Reid Freeman, John Ramsen, Arnold Mack, Alan W. Bailey. *Production Consultants:* Peter Sabiston, Michael Veiner, Fenton Hamilton, Harry M. Brittenham. *Talent Advisers:* Fifi Osgard, Carmen La Via. Filmed in New York City, and at Pinewood Studios, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A sniper strikes in busy Manhattan, killing people from a high water tower. The NY police surround the killer, and detective Peter Nicholas attempts to talk the sniper, Harold Gorman, down from his perch. Before committing suicide, Gorman tells Peter that “God told him to” kill the innocent on the streets below.

Peter, a devout Catholic, is disturbed by the incident, as his is girlfriend Casey. Contemplating a divorce from his wife, Martha, Peter has little time for such a bizarre case. Soon, however, Peter is drawn in deeper when a man who went on a killing spree with a knife tells Peter that “God told” him to kill, before expiring. On the same day, Nicholas receives an anonymous phone tip that five people will die at the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, and that the killer will be a cop! Peter tries to prevent the deaths, but it is too late. A cop opens fire on the crowd, and after he is shot, reports that God told him to commit murder.

Investigating further, Peter learns that every killer was accompanied at some point by a hippie-like guru called Bernard Phillips. When he goes to Phillips' apartment, Bernard's mother tries to kill Peter, her dying words an explanation, again, about God's will. After an autopsy of Mrs. Phillips, the coroner reveals that she died a virgin ... so Bernard's birth must have been a "virgin" one. Peter is troubled by this revelation and visits with the doctor who delivered Bernard some years earlier. He learns that Bernard Phillips is neither male nor female. Peter then learns the strange situation revolving around Mrs. Phillips' pregnancy. In 1951, she reported being abducted by a spaceship. This revelation leads Peter to the inevitable conclusion that "God" is an ancient astronaut and his son, Bernard Phillips, is ordering people to kill one another. Everett Lukas, a local reporter, prints this theory in a newspaper in the column "Science Today," and it causes panic, and mass-hysteria, throughout New York.

Meanwhile, a drug dealer kills a crooked cop and blames the murder on God, making the crime look like another in the bizarre series. At the same time, a secret conspiracy of influential men, apparently in league with God (i.e. Bernard), are instructed to bring Peter into the fold. Peter meets with a representative of the conspiracy, but when he reveals the alien connection, the conspirator is murdered by a God-induced heart attack. Another member of the secret organization tries to push Peter onto the subway tracks. Peter stops him, and orders the man to take him to Bernard, the living God.

After a brief, fruitless confrontation with the Christ figure, Peter realizes he is somehow different too. He flees from Bernard's company and searches for his own identity. An orphan adopted young, Peter learns his birth mother, Elizabeth Mullin, was also abducted by aliens, and impregnated with an inhuman seed. Realizing he is part extra-terrestrial, Peter says goodbye to Martha and his girlfriend Casey, and uses his newfound mental abilities to kill the murderous drug dealer and his associates.

Finally, Peter confronts Bernard, and Phillips reveals that he wants to bear Peter's child, thus creating another God-like hybrid. Peter refuses to help Bernard, and the two men fight, their incredible

psychic powers unleashed. Bernard's apartment building collapses, and Peter is consequently tried for murder. His defense? "God told me to..."

COMMENTARY: Larry Cohen of *It's Alive* (1973) fame returns to horror movie territory in the chilling *God Told Me To*. The premise of the film is that God is using unwitting (and unwilling man) as his instrument of death on Earth, and that "random" violence is not random at all, but the handiwork of a superior being. In addition to that tantalizing premise, *God Told Me To* charts much of the terrain later handled so expertly on Chris Carter's *The X-Files*, specifically the mythology of the "alien abduction" and a conspiracy of men seeking to control information about said aliens.

It's something of a revelation to watch this 1976 film today, because it finds a "reason" behind the random violence that plagued our society in the 1990s. Most people consider random violence to be violent outbreaks of individuals crippled by psychoses. *God Told Me To* suggests that snipers, psychos and other so-called mental deviates are actually the "hands" of a more advanced being who can manipulate man via some strange "power." It is a context that works, and puts so-called "random violence" in a new perspective. As is typical for Larry Cohen, he is interested in the social aspects of his horror, not just the effects. In *It's Alive*, he played on audience fears of pollution, genetic mutation, radiation and the like. In *God Told Me To*, he stirs audience anxiety by suggesting that crazy people (like the Son of Sam or Charles Manson) are actually in the "grip" of God.

This premise raises so many questions that *God Told Me To* attains layers of depth beyond the normal horror movie. Besides attempting to frame an order around something inherently disordered (crime), the film asks other important queries. For instance, if God is directing these murders, is it right to stop, or to interfere with his plan? And that tangles with yet another interrogative. If God were on Earth, would we understand his mechanisms? The film is also clever about depicting the "true" nature of this God/alien, as it plunders mythological elements of the afterlife. To reach the so-called God, hero Lo Bianco rides an elevator into a basement, representing a descent into New York's

underworld. There, a furnace burns bright and clearly represents a hellfire of God's domain. Thus, ultimately, Lynch's character is equated not with God and Heaven, but with Satan and his fire and brimstone world of Hell.

About mid-way through the film, it becomes clear that "God" is not behind the murders. Instead, Lo Bianco uncovers a conspiracy of men surrounding an alien life form. This extraterrestrial is the result of "strange" experiments in breeding conducted by alien life forms years earlier. Thus Lynch, and ultimately Lo Bianco, are revealed as hybrid aliens. The notion of aliens and humans combining forces to create a "new" race (of hybrids) is a central tenet of *The X-Files*. Heightening similarities, the hybrids are controlled/protected in *God Told Me To* by a mysterious cabal of white men, not unlike "the syndicate" in *The X-Files*. Of course, *The X-Files* has gone off in its own wonderfully original way, but *God Told Me To* explores many of the same issues.

God Told Me To also has something in common with another science fiction TV classic: the British-made *Space: 1999*. Oddly, some special effects sequences from Brian Johnson's work on *Space: 1999* have been lifted whole and deposited into *God Told Me To*. The alien spacecraft that kidnaps Lynch's mother to impregnate her is actually footage of Moonbase Alpha's eagle spaceship landing on a planetary surface in the episode "A Matter of Life and Death." The interior of the spaceship, where the poor woman is held against her will, is a "still" of Moonbase Alpha's travel tube! For anyone familiar with *Space: 1999*, it is a jarring experience to see the eagle serving as an "abduction" device for an alien culture!

God Told Me To is a very good film, but it falls apart in the third act. Once the mystery is solved, and it is learned that the snipers are being manipulated not by God but by a half-alien/half-human hybrid, the story seems less interesting. Although Cohen cogently expresses the notion that there will always be people trying to take advantage of God's name, the latter portion of the film devolves into unspectacular action. As opposed to the early sniper scenes (one of which includes a cameo appearance by Andy Kaufman), the final battle doesn't make a lot of sense. Peter and Bernard fight, and the building around them collapses, killing Bernard. How did so

powerful an entity die so easily? Why did the building collapse? It smacks of convenience rather than climax, though it is important to remember that this is a low-budget film, with limited resources.

The most enjoyable aspect of *God Told Me To* may simply be how it reframes parts of Von Däniken (author of *Chariots of the Gods*) and the Bible, including stories of Abraham, Isaac, Moses and Jesus, to tell its story of a “superior” being living on earth. In the crisis between Peter and Bernard, one is also reminded of Cain and Abel. This is smart material that expresses how mythology could play a role in human history, even in the 1970s. Other productions have tried for the same blend, but *God Told Me To* works as horror, fantasy and science fiction.

***Grizzly* (1976) * ½**

Critical Reception

“...such a blatant imitation of *Jaws*.... [However,] not only clumsily plotted, photographed and edited, it is also downright rude when it insists on showing us the bear lopping off an arm or decapitating a horse.”—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, May 13, 1976, page 41.

“...an idea-for-idea, character-for-character, and sometimes even shot-for-shot knock-off of *Jaws*.”—*Time*: “Claws,” June 7, 1976, page 74.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher George (Kelly); Andrew Prine (Don); Richard Jaeckel (Scott); Joan McCall (Allison); Joe Dorsey (Kittridge); Charles Kissinger (Dr. Hallitt); Kermit Echols (Corwin); Tom Arcaragi (Tom); Vicki Johnson (Gail); Catherine Rickman (June); Maryann Hearn (Margaret); Mike Clifford (Pat); Sandra Dorsey (Sally); Gene Witham (Harry); David Holt (Lone Hunter); Susan Orpin (Mother); Brian Robinson (Bobby); David Newton (Mike); Mike Gerschefski (George).

CREW: Edward L. Montoro Presents a William Girdler Film, *Grizzly*. *Filmed in:* TODD AO-35. *Color:* Movielab. *Associate Producer:* Lee S. Jones, Jr. *Director of Photography:* William Asman. *First Assistant Director/ Production Manager:* J. Patrick Kelly III. *Second Unit Photography:* Tom Spalding. *First Assistant Camera:* John White. *Second Assistant Camera:* Barry Jones. *Location Sound Recordist:* John Asman. *Re-recording Mixers:* Jay Harding, Bud Grenzbach, John Reitz, Don MacDougall. *Technical Coordinator:* Mike Clark. *Script Supervisor:* Sally

Roddy. *Property Master*: John Falone. *Costume Supervisor*: Kathy Blalock. *Second Assistant Directors*: Joe Nayfack, John Nameth. *Location Coordinator*: Mike Clifford. *Product Office Administration*: Joanne Montaro. *Aerial Coordinator*: Randy York. *Aerial Photography*: Tyler Camera Systems. *Sound Effects Editor*: Fred Brown. *Music Editor*: Ken Johnson. *Assistant Editor*: Chris Ness. *Dialogue Coach*: Harvey Flaxman. *Music Orchestrators*: Robert O'Ragland, Jack Hayes. *Titles and Opticals*: CFI, Howard Anderson. *Re-recording*: Glen Glenn Sound. *Location Equipment*: Cinemobile Systems, Inc. *Special Effects*: Phil Corey. *Make-up*: Gene Witham. *Editor*: Bub Asman. *Music*: Robert O'Ragland Conducting the National Philharmonic Orchestra of London. *Screenplay*: Harvey Flaxman, David Sheldon. *Executive Producer*: Edward L. Montoro. *Producers*: David Sheldon, Harvey Flaxman. *Directed by*: William Girdler. A Film Ventures International Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In a national park in the Pacific Northwest, forest ranger Kelly and his men worry about the overabundance of campers and back-packers during an especially busy season. Their concerns are justified when two teenage campers are killed by a giant grizzly bear. Kelly and his girlfriend Alison, a photographer, start to conduct a search for the missing girls with a team of rangers.

Kelly teams up with naturalist Arthur Scott and helicopter pilot Don to hunt down the murderous bear even as his publicity-conscious boss holds Kelly responsible for the deaths. The trio head out into the woods to find the 2,000 lb. killer, but arrive too late to stop another murder. The animal strikes again, straying into a campground and ripping apart another camper. While the park supervisor continues to argue responsibility, the grizzly attacks yet again, clawing a lone hunter. This time, the victim falls into a river and escapes.

A trio of hunters capture a bear cub to use as bait. They draw the adult grizzly out, but the plan fails when the adult bear eats the cub instead. Kelly, Scott and Don develop a plan to kill the beast, though Scott would prefer to capture the animal for study. He plans to dress up like a bear himself, get close, and then tranquilize the beast.

The grizzly attacks a ranger tower where a deputy is stationed. The bear brings the tower down with ease, killing the frightened ranger. The bear also attacks a little boy and his mother, even as the park supervisor insists on keeping the parks open for tourists.

Scott puts his stealth plan into action, but is mauled (and then buried) by the bear. He survives the brutal attack, but the bear returns to finish off his meal. As Kelly and Don mourn Scott, they continue their hunt. They chase the bear down in Don's copter, but it counterattacks and damages the chopper. Don is crushed in the landed helicopter, leaving Kelly to blow the grizzly to smithereens with a bazooka.

COMMENTARY: Although *Jaws* (1975) inspired numerous horror films including Universal's *The Car* (with a black automobile substituting for the great white shark), and Dino De Laurentiis's *Orca* (with a killer whale as protagonist/antagonist), the late William Girdler, auteur of *Asylum of Satan* (1971), *Three on a Meat Hook* (1973) and *Abby* (1974), earns the rip-off crown for directing the abysmal *Grizzly*, a by-the-numbers yet wholly incompetent remake of *Jaws* featuring a big bear terrorizing hikers in the mountains. At times, the Harvey Flaxman–David Sheldon script is so imitative that the work actually appears to be adapted from Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb's *Jaws* script—only minus quality, of course.

As many viewers will no doubt recall, *Jaws* dealt with a triumvirate of heroes facing down a deadly opponent. There was Brody (Roy Scheider), the police sheriff of Amity and bedrock of decency. There was young Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss), the man of science who had as much enthusiasm and curiosity about the shark as fear. And finally, there was the old sea-dog Quint (Robert Shaw), captain of the *Orca*, and *Jaws*' only "local" color (Quint was an Amity fisherman given to singing dirty songs and limericks...).

Going boldly where *Jaws* has gone before, *Grizzly* provides audiences the same dynamics. Not similar dynamics—the *same* dynamics. Christopher George's Kelly is a square, honorable park ranger, a symbol of authority. Scott (Richard Jaeckel) is a man of science, determined to capture and study the bear rather than kill it. And, finally, Don (Andrew Prine) is a pilot not of a boat, but a helicopter. If that brief description does not sound wholly derivative, there are supplementary details to consider. In the course of *Grizzly*, Kelly fights a jurisdictional, political dispute with a supervisor who wants to keep the park open despite the obvious danger presented by a murderous grizzly bear. Of course, this is an outright echo of the battle between Brody and Murray Hamilton's Amity mayor in *Jaws*.

Still not convinced? Christopher George, like Scheider, gets to have a love interest and play a drunk scene in *Grizzly*.

Need more evidence? Remember how in *Jaws*, Hooper went underwater in a shark cage to inject the great white with a hypodermic filled with tranquilizers? In *Grizzly*, Jaeckel dresses up like a bear in a ridiculous fur stole (no kidding!) to get close to the animal and tranquilize it!

Require more? Remember the wonderful scene in *Jaws* when Quint (speaking with a distinct New England accent), recounted the story of a shark attack (upon the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*) and revealed he was a veteran of World War II? Well, *Grizzly*'s pilot, Don, speaks with a Southern drawl (there's that local color!) and recounts a tale of an animal attack (bear, not shark) and service in Vietnam.

Beyond the derivative characters, *Grizzly* pauses (or is that pawzes?) to repeat many incidents from the Spielberg opus. The wrong-headed supervisor and "beach/park stays open" debate have already been noted, but there are other similarities. In *Jaws*, a reward is posted for the shark's death, and local fishermen (many drunk) take to the sea *en masse* with munitions to win the prize money. In *Grizzly*, redneck hunters—similarly drunk and armed—arrive in the park to take matters into their own hands.

Then, of course, there is the central threat: an animal (shark/grizzly) committing gruesome murders in an unspoiled area of

human recreation (beaches/state park), and thus the inevitable animal attacks. In *Jaws*, a lovely teenager shed her bathing suit and went skinny dipping in the ocean ... only to meet her unpleasant fate. *Grizzly* strives for the same level of titillation and terror by having a professional park ranger (aware that a grizzly is on a killing spree, by the way), take off her clothes in the wild and walk under a waterfall ... all in her panties and bra. Of course, she is promptly killed.

William Girdler apparently studied *Jaws* in great detail, and apes Spielberg's directorial technique whenever possible. Instead of subjective camera P.O.V. shark attacks, the audience is treated to subjective camera P.O.V. bear attacks. Instead of a climactic set piece aboard a boat, Girdler stages (or mis-stages) a climactic helicopter crash. But even if Girdler has an eye for nature (and the film features some lovely aerial photography of the mountains and surrounding terrain), he cannot match Spielberg's skill with performers. *Grizzly* fails to scare not because it is imitative, not because it is stupid, but because the actors never once, not for a second, sell the notion that the bear frightens them. The lovely hiker who survives a bear attack and is then chased by the animal through the woods appears to be on Valium, hardly registering any recognizable emotion, let alone terror.

Perhaps Girdler was doomed from the outset. In picking a bear as a shark surrogate, he picked the wrong animal, and that too renders *Grizzly* less than scary. This bear is no eating engine with razor teeth, gliding through an alien terrain such as the ocean. He's a big furry ball with gentle eyes. He tromps about, almost innocently, through a park. He's no more frightening than a trip to the zoo, and so *Grizzly* is ultimately a very silly film, a collection of bloody effects and scraps from *Jaws'* table.

LEGACY: The low-budget *Grizzly* was a surprise box-office hit, ranking as the top-grossing independent film of 1976. Though Girdler died at age 30, producer Montoro brought the terror back for *Grizzly 2: The Predator*, a 1987 sequel starring Charlie Sheen.

The Haunting of Julia (1976) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Mia Farrow (Julia Loftin); Keir Dullea (Magnus); Tom Conti (Marc); Robin Gammell (David Swift); Jill Bennett (Lilly); Cathleen Nesbitt (Mrs. Rodge).

CREW: *Director of Photography:* Peter Hannan. *Art Director:* Brian Morris. *Film Editor:* Ron Wisman. *Associate Producer:* Hugh Harlow. *Music Composed and Performed by:* Colin Burns. *Creative Producer:* Julian Melzack. *Screenplay by:* Dave Humphries. *From the Novel Julia by:* Peter Straub. *Produced by:* Peter Fetterman, Alfred Pariser. *Directed by:* Richard Loncraine. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Little Katie's parents are horrified when she chokes to death over breakfast. Julia Loftin, her mother, is shellshocked, and sent to a hospital over her grief. When released, she leaves her cold-hearted husband, Magnus, and buys a strange old home over his objections. Soon, Julia starts to imagine that she sees Katie in the gloomy residence.

One night, Julia holds a séance with her new boyfriend, Marc, and Lilly, Magnus's sister. Still deeply saddened by Katie's death, Julia has difficulties with the séance and leaves the circle, but the medium warns her to leave the house at once. She senses "wickedness" and the spirit of a child there. Thinking the child is her Katie, Julie decides to stay in the haunted house even as Magnus tries to convince Marc that it would be better for Julia to leave. One night, when Magnus breaks into the house, something kills him in the basement.

Julia learns from a neighbor that the former owner of her house had a child who died under tragic circumstances. Feeling a kinship, Julia goes to the library and learns that the child, Geoffrey Braeden, was found murdered in a nearby park in 1938. She visits the boy's mother, a blind woman who believes that a group of children murdered her son. She has been tracking the now-grown culprits ever since. Julia visits one of the murderers, Captain Winters, but

he tells her to leave him alone and let the past remain dead. Then Julia visits David Swift, another murderer. Not long after, Swift falls to his death in what appears to be an accident.

Julia decides to visit the mother of the last of the now-grown child murderers, Olivia Rodge. Now in a mental home, old Mrs. Rodge warns Julia that evil never dies, and then promptly dies of a heart attack. Julia returns home and realizes she is being haunted not by Katie or Geoffrey, but by the malevolent, deceptive spirit of Olivia. Still, Julia longs for some connection to a child, so she tells Olivia that everything is settled, and asks her to stay with her. Instead, the monstrous Olivia slashes Julia's throat, killing her.

COMMENTARY: A woman living alone in a haunted house, vulnerable after the untimely death of her child, is a classic horror movie template, and *The Haunting of Julia* uses it to moderately successful effect. Mia Farrow is strong in the lead role, and the film is well shot and hypnotic in a lugubrious and methodical way. The film walks a fine line between "boring" and "trance-like," but ultimately hits enough horror notes to merit a positive review.

The look of *The Haunting of Julia* is part of the positive side of the equation. The camerawork is precise, and the color scheme of the film is autumnal and washed out, a reflection, no doubt, of Julia's perception of life after she has lost her child, Katie. Director Loncraine also knows how to provide the all-important "jolt" moment. Here, Julia walks up the stairs in her haunted house, and suddenly the audience is confronted with her reflection in a mirror. It's an unexpected start, and perfectly executed. Basically stated then, the mood of this movie is more important than the actual story (which is as hazy and washed-out as the cinematography).

The Haunting of Julia is a textbook example of the differences between 1970s and 1990s horror movies. Even moderately successful films of the '70s, like *Julia*, are filled with mood and suspense. In the 1990s, special effects substitute for these effects. And that may be the ultimate reason this film merits a positive review. It is creepy, dark, and elegiac. It works in subtle ways, but is also slow and somewhat confusing. Still, it is better than *The Haunting* (1999) and most other CGI-motivated horror films of the last decade. It may not understand story, but it understands

humanity, and focuses on that rather than technology.

The Haunting of Julia opens with a striking scene of powerful effect. Julia's daughter Katie chokes over breakfast, and Julia cuts the child's throat to dislodge the food. As the film suggests, it is actually this bloody act that kills Katie. It's a disturbing scene of unexpected horror as life goes from normal to terrible in an instant. That scene sets off one of the film's enduring subplots, that Julia may be schizophrenic, or evil herself. Is she possessed by Olivia, or just haunted by her actions? Did she kill her own daughter or attempt to save her, and what is the difference in those impulses? In examining this aspect of the film, Loncraine makes more than a standard "haunting" picture. For instance, it is no accident that people die after Julia visits them. Are they actually her victims, or the victims of an evil spirit? Horror films that try to play with reality, and offer opposing views like this, are always interesting, and *The Haunting of Julia* is no exception. In *Rosemary's Baby*, the film allowed the perception, for most of its running time, that there were two distinct realities. In one reality, Rosemary (Farrow again!) was just a very paranoid woman undergoing a difficult pregnancy. The other reality was that the conspiracy of Satanists was real. Of course, in the end everybody understood which perception was real, but the film worked because reality could be perceived each way right up until the ending. *The Haunting of Julia* isn't quite that clever, but it is an effective horror film in many senses.

Restraint is really the name of the game in this film. Loncraine keeps his cards close to his vest, and the audience never sees what kills Magnus. Likewise, Julia catches glimpses of a child she thinks is Katie, but there is never any clarity. One is reminded of another great horror film, *Don't Look Now* (1973), in which Donald Sutherland kept seeing a person in a slicker and mistaking that "ghoul" for his deceased daughter. *The Haunting of Julia* offers three possibilities. The child is Katie, trying to warn her mom, she's a random child that reminds Julia of her family tragedy, or, finally, she is the evil Olivia leading Julia down a path of terror.

There hasn't been a lot written about *The Haunting of Julia*, and that's probably because it seems distancing. It's a slow film, and many characters, such as Magnus (Dullea), are cold and remote. It

is a modest horror film that doesn't fill the audience with enthusiasm, but like *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* (1971) seems to have an understanding of how overall mood can generate discomfort. For most viewers, the film may be a battle between boredom and chills, but for this reviewer, the chills finished slightly ahead.

***Haunts* (1976) * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: May Britt (Ingrid Swenson); Cameron Mitchell (Uncle Carl); Aldo Ray (Sheriff Peterson); William Gray Espy (Frankie); Ben Hammer (Vicar); E.J. Andre (Doc); Kendall Jackson (Loretta); Susan Nohr (Nell); Robert Hippard (Bill Sprye); Don Dolan (Deputy Hellman); Lette Rehnolds (Margaret); Jim McKenry (Bartender); Warren Peters (Howard Peter); Judy Franks (Mrs. Peterson); Bob Avery (TV Interviewer); Brian Frankish (Newscaster); Larry Finegan (Mr. Lewis); Elmer Adams (Frank Olsen); Norm Rubinfeld, Sandy Rubinfeld, Eddie Rubinfeld, Michel Rubinfeld (the Olsen Family); Margot Lowell (Brigitte); Toni Lemos (Margaret's Mother).

CREW: *Music:* Pino Donaggio. *Edited by:* Richard E. Westover. *Director of Photography:* Larry Secrist. *Written by:* Anne Marisse and Herb Freed. *Executive Producer:* Norman G. Rudman. *Produced by:* Burt Weissbourd. *Co-Produced and directed by:* Herb Freed. *Casting:* Anne Marisse. *Make-up Artist and Hair Design:* Jeffrey Angell. *Location Design:* Sheral Hippard, Rosemarie Belden. *Costume Designer:* Charles Berliner. *Production Manager:* Brian Frankish. *Assistant Director:* David McGiffert. *Production Associate:* Elmer Adams. *Lighting Director:* Stephen Slocumb. *Sound Effects Editor:* John P. Howard, Jr. *Re-recording:* Ted Gomillion. *Gaffer:* Jeffrey Briggs. *Key Grip:* Gary Cyr. *Property Master:*

Michael Bossick. *Location Unit Manager*: Robert Hippard. *Assistant Editors*: Franklin D. Cofod, Gregory McClatchy, Brena Franks. *Negative Cutter*: Magic Film Works. *Re-recording Engineer*: Robb Keystone. *Boom Operator*: Janusz Ciestowski. *Location Consultant*: Toni Lemos. *Production Coordinator*: Kathleen Lawrence Gale. *Production Assistant*: Scott Hennesy, Melvin Frieman, Anthony Miksak, Munsell St. Clair. *Post-production*: West Ho Films. *Sound Transfers*: Magnatronics. *Titles and Opticals*: The Optical House. *Sound*: Audio Services Inc. *Title Design*: Beau Tekra. *Color*: Deluxe. *Music Arranged and Conducted by*: Nando DeLuca. *Music Score*: Edizioncurci. *Additional Music*: Brent L. Lewis. A Production of American General Production Company, in Association with Entertainment Service, Inc. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 97 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A masked killer strikes at the isolated Olsen farmhouse by night, sending the nearby town into a tailspin of suspicion. Among those worried the most is Ingrid Swenson, a lonely and repressed woman who lives on a farm with her seldom-seen Uncle Carl. Ingrid is worried because the scissors are missing from her sewing basket ... and the masked killer murdered the Olsens with a pair of scissors!

Because of a childhood trauma, Ingrid is distrustful of all men, even Sheriff Peterson, the town constable and lush. At the butcher's store, Ingrid also senses trouble, suspecting that the local named Frankie wants to rape her. And, at her choir meeting, Ingrid brushes off Bill Sprye, a new arrival in town who shows an interest in her. Ingrid fears that any of these men could be the maniac killing women by night. On her way home from choir practice, the killer attacks Ingrid, but she escapes after smashing his head with a rock. She tells Uncle Carl what happened, but he refuses to believe her story. When Ingrid calls Sheriff Peterson, he is drunk and tells her to lock all her doors.

The next morning, Ingrid finds the corpse of Nell, the town tramp,

in her chicken coop. She reports this to the police, and they investigate. Later, Ingrid takes a shower to relax and is attacked by Frankie the butcher. He rapes her and then leaves. Soon, the killer strikes again, but this time he is tracked by the police. They corner the psycho at a wood mill and shoot him dead. Unmasking him, the police learn that the psycho is Bill Sprye.

But Ingrid isn't convinced the danger is passed, and with good reason. Frankie breaks into her house, ties up Uncle Carl, and attacks Ingrid again. Ingrid stabs Frankie to death and Carl buries the body. Though Carl warns Ingrid not to go to the police, Ingrid tells Sheriff Peterson what has happened. Unfortunately, her story does not jibe with reality. Firstly, a doctor's exam confirms that Ingrid is a virgin—never raped. Second, Frankie is alive and well and dating Peterson's daughter Loretta, and thirdly, Ingrid lives alone ... there is no Uncle Carl! Ingrid, who has imagined all of the attacks (except those by Sprye), commits suicide.

At Ingrid's funeral, her Uncle Carl shows up from New York City. Only he knows the real reason Ingrid was insane. Many years earlier, she witnessed Carl and her mother—Carl's sister—having sexual intercourse. Ashamed, Ingrid's mother committed suicide and Ingrid was dispatched to an orphanage for 13 years. By the time of her release at age 18, she was irrevocably mad.

COMMENTARY: The low budget *Haunts* is a few twists shy of coherent. It's a psychological thriller told from the perspective of a very sick woman, but her story is so poorly written, directed, acted and edited, that it's anybody's guess as to what really happens in the picture. The final scene of the film is a ludicrous exposition sequence that tries to square the confusing film with a sense of reality, but even the coda feels tacked on and awkward.

This film feels foreign. Whether it was shot in the United States or not, the film never feels genuinely American, and that's a problem since all this is supposed to be occurring in our nation's heartland. The actors don't seem comfortable with English, and they are all remote and odd. Aldo Ray plays the sheriff, and seems to exist in a constant state of confusion and intoxication. Cameron Mitchell plays a specter for much of the film, and fails to convey clues as to what his character actually represents. May Britt, as Ingrid, is okay,

but not a strong enough actress to carry material that depends so much on the audience's understanding of her perspective and character. Basically, all the performances are downright bizarre ... which, actually, fits in with the film's mood. It's as if Ingmar Bergman had been lobotomized, and then let loose to direct a horror film with one hand tied behind his back. There are nonsensical dramatic pauses, violent interludes with no follow-up, and characters that appear and disappear according to some incomprehensible plan.

There are some disturbing images in *Haunts*. The film affords its audience extreme close-ups of the goat milking process. It then crosscuts the view of the goat udders with quick flashes of human lovemaking. It's a really yucky connection. In another strange moment, Ingrid imagines a butcher cutting meat, and that notion is crosscut with visions of child molestation ... another really unsavory visual connection. Later, there are more close-ups of animal teats being milked, but ultimately there is blood in the milk, and so on. Blood in milk can be a very powerful image, as witnessed in such films as *It's Alive* (1973) and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, but in *Haunts* it's pretty meaningless, and therefore powerless.

The film is very strange, very muddled, and apparently meant to indicate that Ingrid has a disturbed life in which she associates her existence on the farm with abuse as a child. It might have worked if the idea weren't so jumbled with a host of others. For instance, does Uncle Carl exist? Is he a kind and gentle man or a disbelieving, nasty fellow? The truth is Ingrid's "Uncle Carl" is a manifestation of her imagination, and doesn't actually appear in "the flesh" till the end of the movie. Since he's a product of her imagination, he can be anything she wants him to be. That's neat in one sense, but detrimental to narrative clarity in another.

Tension is minimized too. There is little suspense or horror as Sprye is revealed as the town killer. It should be a big moment, with a sense of satisfaction, so that the ensuing twist, revealing Ingrid's complicity in the violence, is a jarring surprise. That effect is beyond *Haunts'* ability to generate. It doesn't help, either, that the editing is really bad, the sound synching poor, and the script

confusing. This is a bad movie.

***J.D.'s Revenge* (1976) * * ***

Critical Reception

“*J.D.'s Revenge* would be bad enough if its only flaws were an excessive reliance on repetitive scenes of gore and a proclivity for mistaking repulsive effects for frightening ones. But it seems to revel in the abuses of women....”—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, August 27, 1976, page 47:2.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Glynn Turman (Isaac “Ike” Kendricks); Lou Gossett (Reverend Elija Bliss); Joan Pringle (Christella); Carl Crudup (Tony); James Louis Watkins (Carl); Fred Pinkard (Theotis Bliss); Jo Anne Meredith (Sara Divine); Alice Jubert (Roberta Bliss/Bobby Jo Walker); David McKnight (J.D. Walker); Stephanie Faulkner (Phyllis); Fuddle Bagley (Enoch Land); Earl Billings (Captain Turner); Paul Galloway (Garage Man); Barbara Tasker (Sheryl); Tom Alden (Higgins); Melvin Bijou, Jr. (Football Player); Blue Lu Barker (Barkeep); Joseph Collins (Proprietor); Fred Ford (Doctor); Chauncey Leon Gilbert (Football Player); Ruth Kempf (Woman Passenger); Bob Minor (Husband); Tony Owens (Leader); Samuel “Catfish” Routh (Barker); Hazel Roberts (1942 Woman); Timothy Toseborough (Mad Man); Rhonda Shear (1942 Girl); Danny Dunn (Detective).

CREW: American International Pictures Presents an Arthur Marks Film, *J.D.'s Revenge*. *Executive in Charge of Production:* Charles Stroud. *Director of Photography:* Harry May. *Editor:* George Folsey, Jr. *Music:* Robert Prince. “*I Will Never Let You Go*”

lyrics by: Joseph A. Greene. Music by: Robert Prince and Joseph A. Greene. Written by: Jaison Starkes. Produced and Directed by: Arthur Marks. Associate Producer: Robert E. Shultz. Unit Production Manager: Morris Abrams. First Assistant Director: Lee Rafner. Second Assistant Director: Joe Hayfack. Script Supervisor: Les Hoyle. Casting: Betty Martin. Production Assistant: Michael Neale, Alvin Henry. Location Assistant: Nancy Watrous. Mixer: George Malley. Production Coordinator: Paul Marks. Boom: Chic Borland. Special Effects: Roy Downey. Make-up: Robert Norin. Wardrobe: Michael Termini. Assistant Editor: Fabien Tordjmann. Music Editor: Ving Hershon. Sound Effects: Fred Brown. Titles and Optical: MGM. Sound: Ryder Sound Services. Color: Movielab. An American International Pictures Release. M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the New Orleans of 1942, black gangster J.D. Walker witnesses the murder of his sister, Betty Jo, on the “killin’ floor” of a slaughterhouse. He is fingered as the murderer by young Elija Blis, and then shot and killed.

In the 1970s, cabbie by day/law student by night, Isaac “Ike” Kendricks, goes out for a night on the town with his beautiful girlfriend Christella and two friends celebrating their first year wedding anniversary. They all attend a hypnotism show, and Ike is hypnotized on stage. While imagining being in a “cold place,” he has a shocking vision of the slaughterhouse where J.D. and Betty Jo died all those years ago. Later, at a disco, the vision repeats, and Ike complains of a headache. These headaches get worse over the next week, but a doctor friend suggests that Ike is merely feeling the stress of an upcoming exam.

But Ike is not okay. He starts to exhibit strange behavior. When he looks in the mirror he sees J.D.’s scarred reflection gazing back at him. He goes to a bookie and starts gambling on impulse. And, while making love to Christella, he is more violent and powerful than usual. Then Ike becomes violent while driving his cab and

beats a female customer.

Possessed by J.D. Walker, Ike is compelled to see the Reverend Elija Bliss, the self-proclaimed “Champion of God.” He recognizes Bliss as the brother of Theotis, the man responsible for Betty Jo and J.D.’s deaths in the ’40s. Oddly, Bliss also seems to know Ike, commenting that their souls must be “connected.” J.D. starts to make the moves on Roberta, Bliss’s daughter, and then returns home and slaps Christella around. He throws her out of their apartment, now more J.D. than Ike. Later, he rapes Christella, and cuts up a jealous husband with a razor blade when the surprised spouse finds Ike and his wife in the sack together. Christella’s ex-husband, a cop, starts nosing around, concerned by Ike’s abusive behavior.

Still consumed by J.D.’s need for revenge, Ike issues a challenge to Elija, telling him to meet him at the slaughterhouse. By now, Christella has realized that Ike is not himself and resolves to help him. Bliss also knows that something is up and decides it is time for him to exorcise J.D.’s spirit. The final act plays out at the slaughterhouse as everybody learns the truth. Roberta is actually the daughter of Betty Jo and Theotis, not Bliss, and he murdered Betty Jo and J.D. to hide that secret. Once the truth is known and Theotis is dead, the violent J.D. leaves Ike for good. Elija exonerates Ike from any criminal activity, purporting that he was a vessel possessed for God’s justice and that J.D. Walker now rests in peace.

COMMENTARY: *J.D.’s Revenge* represents the last gasp of 1970s blaxploitation horror, and it is among the best of that genre. Like *Blacula* (1971) or *Blood Couple* (1973), *J.D.’s Revenge* is valuable not just because it is a well-told story about a horror trope (“possession”) but because the filmmakers have found contemporary relevance for the story. The main character, Ike, views himself as a “sissified” black man in white culture, and, though criminal in action and intent, J.D. is depicted as a strong, powerful black man who attracts the ladies and earns the respect of his enemies. The message implicit in the film is that contemporary black culture worships the gangster as a figure of strength. By contrast, black men like Ike, who assimilate into the white culture, are viewed as weak, or having sold out. It’s a compelling idea, and the film benefits from some fine characterizations, as well as this

unique view of African-American culture.

Ike (Glynn Turman) is an African-American man attempting to live the American dream. He attends law school by night and drives a cab by day, but his goal is the shared aspiration of all people in our nation: to better oneself. In the early scenes, there are a few glimpses of Ike's domestic life with Christella, which seems happy and normal. In a surprising turn, these characters actually talk and act as real people might, not as racial or horror movie stereotypes. About living in a white society, one of Ike's friends comments that Ike needs to "go into" his "nigger act," implying that Ike must appear subservient and mild to fit in with the demands of white culture.

But after the hypnotism, Ike is possessed by J.D., a gangster from the 1940s, and this possession has the effect of changing Ike's life quite dramatically. The "nigger" act is no longer necessary. In this case, it is not hard to view possession as a physical manifestation of Ike's intrinsic psychological conflict over his own nature. He wants to be strong (a role white society doesn't permit), and yet he wants to fit in (which requires he cloak his own natural strengths and individuality).

In an interesting twist to the tale, Ike is also better in bed when "freed" by the lustful J.D. The film boasts a pretty intense sex scene, and Ike is rough with Christella during the coupling. Yet it is also pretty clear that she enjoys the experience. J.D. is more aggressive, more "manly" than the "good" Ike in bed, and that is arousing for Christella. Later, when Ike/J.D. has intercourse with a married woman, she also notes his power, and that the experience was the "best fucking" she ever had. Forget law school or an education, J.D.'s spirit has freed Ike's id. Previously, he had to be contained by society's expectations of him, now he is allowed to be a powerful, independent man. That's something black men in America are reviled for, and sometimes destroyed for.

The dark side of Ike's newfound power is that he has also become a terrible abuser. He strikes Christella, and treats her very badly. The message seems to be that there can't be one aspect of unfettered strength without another. The same thing that makes a person (of any color) a powerhouse in the sexual arena may also result in a

need to resort to physical violence in others. Notably, Christella does *not* enjoy this “new” aspect of her boyfriend. What she values intellectually is different than what she values sexually, and that’s an underlying message of the film. Christella may want a good lay, but she also wants the thoughtful, considerate man she fell in love with.

Still, Christella’s reaction to physical abuse is interesting, and even telling. “He wasn’t himself,” she says of Ike after he has hurt her so badly. Of course, she’s correct, he’s not actually himself at all, but J.D. But then again, the explanation that someone is “not himself” is also a classic one of denial and enabling. Women stay with men like this far too often, and make excuses for their violence. *J.D.’s Revenge* captures that notion, and asks if Christella should stay with the man she obviously loves even though his behavior is atrocious and downright dangerous. Interestingly, it is merely the paranormal explanation of “possession” that has changed Ike, not some conventional psychological explanation of deficient personality.

The horror aspects of *J.D.’s Revenge* are handled in acceptable, if not inspired, fashion. Early in the film there is a bloody close-up of a razor blade slashing a woman’s throat, and that same unpleasant weapon is used to slash an irate husband’s face. Later, scenes of the crimson-stained slaughterhouse are crosscut with images of Ike’s hypnosis. In all these instances, the film is gross without being legitimately scary. And once one understands that J.D. has returned from the grave to right a wrong, he is no longer a “scary” character either, just a sort of spectral criminal with an interesting personality. The audience roots for Ike, but at the same time, J.D.’s menace is not as overt as it might have been.

Perhaps the one real flaw of the film is that some of J.D.’s mannerisms seem a little pimpy and campy. In his extravagantly colored fashions and oversized hat, J.D. looks like the unfortunate stereotype of every black pimp ever imagined by Hollywood. That image has become laughable to today’s audiences through its overuse. His “jive” talk doesn’t help the matter either ... it can’t help but get a laugh today, much as hippie lingo, like the word “groovy,” similarly merits chuckles.

Despite minor flaws, *J.D.’s Revenge* is a good horror film with

provocative notions about pride, strength and conformity. In every person, there is the desire to be special; to be strong, powerful and admired. That desire transcends race, or era (whether it be the 1940s, the 1970s of the 21st century). These needs make Ike a sympathetic character. And given the restrictions of '70s America, which wanted African-American men to assimilate and see black culture annihilated, Ike's "transformation" into the lustful, base—*but highly charismatic, desirable, and powerful*—J.D., is quite understandable, even without the paranormal explanation of possession. That the film registers this human longing to be respected is commendable, and makes it seem more than a cut-and-slash blaxploitation picture about a possessed spirit out for revenge.

King Kong (1976) * * * ½

Critical Reception

"...too calculated by half, too lacking in mythic overtones, a film that runs exclusively on borrowed energy, not so much bad as unnecessary. Every once in a while, you are hit with the feeling that this could have been one helluva picture and then you remember it already has been."—Kenneth Turan, *Progressive*: "Beastly," March 1977, page 52.

"...harmless, and not all that difficult to sit through."—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*: "What Are We to Make of Remakes," January 16, 1977.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jeff Bridges (Jack Prescott); Charles Grodin (Fred Wilson); Jessica Lange (Dwan); John Randolph (Captain Ross); Rene Auberjonois (Bagley); Julius Harris (Boan); Jack O'Halloran (Joe Perko); Dennis Fimple (Sunfish); Ed Lauter (Carnahan); Jorge Moreno (Garcia); Mario Gallo (Timmons); John Lone (Chinese Cook); Garry Walberg (Army General); John Agar (City Official); Keny Long (Ape Masked Man); Sid Conrad (Petrox

Chairman); George Whiteman (Army Helicopter Pilot); Wayne Heffley (Air Force Colonel).

CREW: Paramount Pictures and Dino De Laurentiis Present a John Guillermin Film, *King Kong*. *Production Designed by:* Mario Chiari, Dale Hennesy. *Film Editor:* Ralph E. Winters. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* John Barry. *In Charge of Production:* Jack Grossberg. *Director of Photography:* Richard H. Kline. *Executive Producers:* Federico De Laurentiis, Christian Ferry. *Based on the Screenplay by:* James Creelman and Ruth Rose. *From an Idea Conceived by:* Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace. *Screenplay by:* Lorenzo Semple, Jr. *Produced by:* Dino De Laurentiis. *Directed by:* John Guillermin. *Assistant to Producer:* Fredric M. Sidewater. *Casting:* Joyce Selznick and Associates. *Second Unit Director:* William Kronick. *Production Manager:* Terry Carr. *Assistant Director:* David McGiffort, Kurt Newman. *Second Assistant Director:* Pat Kehoe, Nate Haggard. *Production Coordinator:* Lori Imbler. *Set Decorator:* John Francour. *Script Supervisor:* Doris Grau. *Camera Operator:* Al Bettcher. *Assistant Cameraman:* Rob Edesa. *Additional Photographic Effects:* Harold E. Wellman. *Art Directors:* Archie J. Bacon, David A. Constable, Robert Gundlach. *Illustrators:* Mentor Huebner, David Negron. *Sound Mixer:* Jack Solomon. *Property Master:* Jack Marino. *Make-up Artist:* Del Aceredo. *Hairstylist:* Jo McCarthy. *Wardrobe:* Arny Lipin, Fern Weber. *Special Effects:* Glen Robinson, Joe Day. *Hair Design for Kong:* Michaelaino. *Sculptor of Kong:* Don Chandler. *Kong Mechanical Coordinator:* Eddie Surkin. *Miniature Coordinator:* Aldo Puccini. *Stunt Coordinator:* Bill Couch. *Costume Designer:* Moss Mabry. *Gowns and Native Costumes:* Anthea Sylbert. *Post-production Supervisor:* Phil Tucker. *Supervisor of Photographic Effects:* Frank Van Der Veer. *Photo Effects Assistant:* Barry Nolan. *Matte Artist:* Lou Lichtenfield. *Sound Effects:* James J. Klinger. *Music Editor:* Kenneth J.

Hall. *Music Re-recording*: Aaron Rochin. *Assistant Film Editors*: Robert Pergament, Margo Anderson. *Native Dance Choreography*: Claude Thompson. *Extras Casting*: Sally Perle and Associates. *Titles*: Pacific Title and Art Studio. *Miss Lange's Jewelry*: Bulgari. Filmed in Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 135 minutes.

P.O.V.

“The producers wish to acknowledge that Kong has been designed and engineered by Carlo Rambaldi, constructed by Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson ... with special contributions by Rick Baker.”—an end credit in *King Kong*.

“My major disappointment is that, besides the fact that I got screwed royally, this, I think, was my one and only chance to build the ultimate gorilla suit and play it correctly and really have the money and situation to convince the world that it's possible to do a man in a gorilla suit so that it would be very convincing, very accurate, and very exciting”²⁷.—Rick Baker, the man who made “special contributions” to *King Kong*.

“The film simply isn't allowed to speak for itself. I was not displeased with the overall picture. It was totally different from the original, which is now considered a classic. That was an enormous thing to overcome in itself”²⁸.—John Guillermin, director of *King Kong*.

SYNOPSIS: In Surabaya, Indonesia, environmentalist Jack Prescott sneaks aboard the Petrox Explorer as it sets sail for a top-secret, highly mysterious destination. Early into the journey, the vessel hits rough weather and picks up a faint mayday signal. Before long Jack makes himself known to the mission commander on the Explorer, Frank Wilson of Petrox Oil. Wilson, an arrogant corporate-type, believes the ship will strike oil on a secret island (detected by spy

satellite...) hidden behind a fogbank in the Pacific. Jack believes, contrarily, that the island is home to a legendary beast known as Kong.

Jack and Wilson put their differences aside when the Petrox Explorer rescues Dwan, the beautiful sole survivor of the yacht that issued the mayday. On the long journey to the island, Dwan and Jack become close, and Wilson comes up with the idea that Jack should pay for his room and board as the expedition photographer. With the lovely Dwan seeking every photo op, Jack has plenty to photograph.

Before long, the Petrox Explorer passes the ring of fog and discovers a primitive, untouched island. The first landing party, consisting of Wilson, Jack and Dwan, makes for the shore and finds a beautiful, natural beach. The group makes its way across a rugged landscape, but is stopped by a huge, ancient wall. They soon hear drums on the other side and realize the island is inhabited by a native culture. The interlopers watch as the natives conduct a strange ritual in which a young bride is symbolically offered to a man dressed as an ape. The islanders spot the voyeurs and halt their revelries, simultaneously taking an immediate interest in Dwan. They offer to exchange her for several local women. When Wilson refuses, he and his men must fire warning shots with their rifles to prevent an incident.

That night, Dwan is abducted off the Petrox Explorer by a group of islanders. They take her back to the village to become the bride of their god, Kong. Jack, Wilson and the others rush off to rescue her, but Dwan is about to meet Kong. She is escorted out of the massive wall and presented as a gift to Kong, a giant gorilla who towers over the landscape. The monstrous Kong carries Dwan off and heads into the brush. Jack and a team of men pursue the beast while Wilson sets up base camp.

The next morning, Dwan awakens in the jungle near Kong and attempts to escape, but her efforts only enrage the giant ape. When she falls into a mud puddle, Kong washes her in a waterfall. Elsewhere, Wilson learns that the oil on the island won't be usable for some 10,000 years. So, in hopes of salvaging the cost of the trip, he decides to capture Kong as the new mascot for Petrox Oil.

In pursuit of Dwan and Kong, Jack and the others cross a high ravine on a fallen tree trunk. Kong interrupts, mid passage, and sends most of the men plummeting far below to their deaths. Jack survives and continues alone in pursuit of the giant ape. He proceeds to Kong's lair on the inhospitable side of the island and rescues Dwan while Kong battles a giant snake. Racing back to the village with Kong hot on their heels, Jack and Dwan are surprised when Wilson is ready for the beast. He has erected a pit trap with chloroform, which snares Kong and incapacitates the animal.

A defeated Kong is transported back to New York in a massive oil tanker. Dwan is to be a star and Jack Kong's handler, but Jack starts to have moral difficulties with the exploitation of the giant gorilla. In NYC, a gala premiere is held for Kong's unveiling. Jack quits Wilson's circus, but Dwan still wants her shot at stardom. In front of cheering audiences, there is a glitzy re-creation of Dwan's capture by the beast, only this time Kong emerges out of a giant Petrox gas pump instead of the jungle! When the press manhandles Dwan, Kong goes wild and breaks free. He crushes many bystanders, including Wilson, and later derails a train.

Jack and Dwan attempt to escape, but Kong re-captures his bride and scales the World Trade Center. Army helicopters circle and shoot at Kong, leaving Dwan to look on in horror as the amazing beast is massacred. Kong falls to his death from the top of the World Trade Center and his corpse is mobbed by the press. Dwan attempts to reach Jack, but is prevented by the paparazzi. She finally has the fame she so much desired...

COMMENTARY: In the summer '76 issue of Robert F. Skotak's genre magazine *Fantascene*, assistant editor Elaine Edford wrote (of fan response to Kevin Connor's *The Land That Time Forgot*) that: "Hell hath no fury like an animation fan scorned ... this film seems guilty of one major crime—the creatures were not done by Ray Harryhausen or one of his protégés²⁹."

The same might be written of Dino De Laurentiis' bicentennial year remake of *King Kong*, a film that has been the favorite target of reviewers and fans for 25 years.

The crux of the debate is this: Master showman Dino De Laurentiis

promised (and heavily promoted) a special effects breakthrough, but in the end delivered a competently done man-in-suit creation that looked back to the Toho *Godzilla* pictures rather than to the future of visual effects. Yet, outside the arena of special effects achievements, De Laurentiis and director Guillermin delivered something infinitely more interesting than a technology showcase. They totally re-imagined the legend of *King Kong*, making it a meaningful story to 1970s audiences much as the original was meaningful to 1930s viewers. To animation fans, to *Kong* fans, to monster movie fans, however, the decision to update *King Kong* was (and remains today) sacrilege of the highest order.

To wit: in 1999, an editor on one of this author's previous books deleted a reference to the 1976 version of *Kong* from the manuscript out of hand, declaring that such a "bomb" could not be discussed as part of legitimate *King Kong* history. In other words, if you don't like something, erase it. It's the worst instinct of the revisionist historian, and such is the way of many a fan (a term that is an abbreviation of "fanatic," lest we forget). Old films are lauded and cherished because a previous generation of fans grew up with them, and new films are deemed inferior because they do not live up to some pre-conceived notion of what a monster movie should look and sound like.

Being totally objective, one would have to note that 1998's *Godzilla* was a terrible movie ... but it also happened to be the best *Godzilla* movie ever made, at least from certain standpoints. The monster was convincingly rendered (and for the first time, actually frightening rather than laughable), and the special effects were uniformly awe-inspiring. It was a monster movie wherein the monster looked real, moved as if real, and seemed to be in a real (rather than miniature) environment. Had this version been made in 1958, the Devlin-Emmerich *Godzilla* would be cherished by the elder generation of fans as a classic of the genre. Instead, it was made in 1998, and has thus been shunned. But really, what's important in a monster movie? Isn't the effectiveness and believability of the monster the primary issue? On that test, the 1998 *Godzilla* passes with flying colors, when every other previous *Godzilla* film fails.

The 1976 version of *King Kong* has landed in the same boat. Part of the problem is undoubtedly the personality of the producer. Many artists who have dealt with Dino De Laurentiis over the years have come back to report horror stories. He has apparently earned the nickname “Dino De Horrendous.” De Laurentiis himself is guilty of blatant over-promotion on *Kong*, claiming (erroneously) that a giant robot had been used in the film to depict *Kong* when in fact the inexpressive automaton was utilized only in one sequence, and then literally only for a split second. Even worse, screenwriter Semple, director Guillermin, and producer De Laurentiis did not seem to appreciate the first *King Kong* as the genre masterpiece it was. Those are all negative attachments for the picture, no doubt, but, bluntly stated, none of the above information should hinder an enjoyment of the picture they made.

After all, does it hinder one’s enjoyment of *Star Wars* to know that the central premise was lifted, part and parcel from Akira Kurosawa’s *The Hidden Fortress*? Or that Lucas nonetheless turned around and sued *Battlestar Galactica* as being a rip-off of his “original” work? Does knowledge that a mechanical shark malfunctioned so badly on the set of *Jaws* that Spielberg had to shoot around it make one feel differently about that film? Behind-the-scenes stories and comparisons are interesting, but a film is a text, and deserves to be judged by what appears on screen rather than gossip about a producer’s attitudes or propensities towards hyperbole. The remake of *King Kong* has never really been viewed as a film itself, because so many people have instead wanted to sling dirt about its creators and bring all the behind-the-scenes politicking to the forefront.

So, if one is to look objectively at 1976’s *King Kong*, what is there to see? Getting the bad out of the way first, it is clear that the new *King Kong* features passable, but not great, special effects. The primary issue is that often colors do not match in various optical components. In some shots, a mechanical arm (usually gripping Jessica Lange) is optically “connected” to the rest of Kong’s body via rear projection and blue screen. Consequently, one element (either foreground or background) often seems wrong ... either faded or too bright. By the same token, some effects moments are flat-out botched. While Kong is incarcerated in the cargo hold of an

oil tanker, for instance, Dwan is seen to reach out and stroke his face. Unfortunately, Lange's hands touch only air—the Kong component of the shot is off to the right by several feet, well out of reach. Obviously, this footage does not synch, and that is a serious problem. Yet at the risk of further infuriating the old guard of Kong aficionados, this hardly matters when assessing the film as a whole.

Did these same fans complain during the original *King Kong* when Kong's fur shifted and shimmied under the caress of an unseen animator's ham-handed touch? Or when the expressive miniature model of Kong was replaced suddenly (in close-up) by an inexpressive, built-to-scale plaster Kong bust? Undoubtedly not, and rightly so. The film was so well done that such niggling errors didn't compromise the enjoyment of the film one bit.

Likewise, the remake's special effects are for the most part effective enough. It is simply that a double standard exists here, and needs to be acknowledged. The original *Kong's* lapses (sometimes egregious) are passed over because of a longstanding affection for the film, whereas the new *Kong's* lapses are highlighted in an effort to dismiss a project that opted not to employ a Harryhausen, a Danforth, or even a Dave Allen.

In point of fact, many of the special effects in the *King Kong* remake still hold up well, though the film would look even better in black and white, a format that hides seams. The matte painting of Kong's wall is particularly impressive, and very well integrated into live action shots.

More impressive yet, the money shot (Kong's entrance in the picture), does not disappoint. Guillermin's camera adopts a low angle, and Kong, in dark of night, is revealed in all his beastly glory ... and does look more "realistically" like a giant ape than in his previous incarnation. These moments are fine, but the over-reliance on rear-projection is indeed disturbing at points. The scenes atop the World Trade Center are especially weak in this regard. Often "matte" lines are visible all around Kong, and they distract from the important action.

But perhaps it is also fair to acknowledge that the most beautiful moment of the film is special effects related. Kong drops Dwan

(Lange) into a waterfall, and then recovers her in his hand. As he lifts her close to his face, he blow-dries her with his considerable breath, his cheeks swelling and then deflating in most convincing manner. In this moment, Kong feels and looks real. His behavior (gentle, protective, nurturing) is indicative of the great ape's personality, and the special effects reflect that personality by making this gesture of love seem so natural and real.

The 1976 version of *King Kong* works well overall because its creators looked at the elements that made *King Kong* special in the 1930s and then updated those qualities (and that charm) for the 1970s. Although some may quibble with this assessment, the original film glossed over the implications of a rather disturbing story. It was about exploration (rather than exploitation), and showcased a magnificent, mythic adventure. It was about a mission to find and bring back something to the civilized world that had never been seen, let alone imagined, before. The attitude was of American know-how and bravura (if not downright arrogance). Carl Denham, with his newfangled gas grenades, braved a dangerous (read: *non-white, non-Christian*) world to bring back supreme entertainment for a people brought low by an economic depression. Man against nature; man against beast; America above the world—these were the mythic bedrocks of 1933's *King Kong*.

As the 1970s unfurled, there was not depression, but an energy crisis. Additionally, the Vietnam War had discolored permanently American attitudes about foreign interventions. Thus the *King Kong* of '76 revealed a mission not of open-ended exploration, but one of limited resources as the reason for going to Kong's island. Watergate had fueled cynicism about authority figures, so Lorenzo Semple's screenplay re-imagined hero Carl Denham (now Fred Wilson) as someone less trustworthy: an anti-hero, an opportunist, a greedy, nature-raping corporate-type. Or, as Richard Eder wrote of the changes in the *New York Times*:

The impulse to explore, to discover, to bring back what you've discovered [—that which we found in] the first *King Kong* is now replaced by simple greed—the greed of the oil company representative, Fred Wilson, to find a gusher; his greed in trying to

convert King Kong into a gusher of a different sort³⁰.

Not only that, but the mission to Kong's island in the remake is an allegory for American involvement in Vietnam. It is a mission where the enemy is not understood, not respected, but deadly and powerful nonetheless. "Six of my guys are cut off in the bush and you're building monkey traps!?" one shell-shocked Kong hunter complains to Wilson. The Vietnam connection is clear: Wilson is applying (or mis-applying) American technology in a primitive land without understanding the repercussions of his actions. His men may as well be soldiers out there in "the bush," trying to fight an enemy that is smarter than primitive appearances let on.

With such a focus on American imperialism and the exploitation of scant resources, the re-made *King Kong* is also a mature version of *King Kong*. The original film utilized show business as the avenue to Kong's island. Denham was a filmmaker seeking new bread and circuses for the masses. The new *King Kong* reveals instead how corporations exploit "show business" in a celebrity-driven, commercial culture. Wilson is simultaneously oil company executive and host of the King Kong extravaganza. Dwan is similarly obsessed with celebrity, a failed actress hoping to achieve her 15 minutes of fame. The oil company needs a "mascot" to make a profit, and so Kong himself is to become a celebrity. Yet, all these characters are trapped by their prominence in the public eye. Wilson dies performing his duties as host; Dwan loses Jack; and Kong is murdered when he doesn't stay "on-message."

Thus the new *Kong* is evocative of a far less romantic world than the one depicted by the original film. But then the '70s, for all the free love and sexual revolution, were also less romantic and idealistic, than the '30s, weren't they? *King Kong* fans may prefer the more child-like, juvenile world imagined by the 1930s version, but the 1970s version is equally interesting, if more "realistic" and cynical.

Though critics accused *King Kong* of being too topical, too glitzy, and too 1970s, this *Kong* actually looks rather relevant in the age of *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire* and *Temptation Island*, since it pointedly asks its main characters what price they would pay for fame. Is one creature's imprisonment, his loss of freedom, worth

their media success? Prescott is seduced (briefly) by celebrity before realizing he is involved in a “grotesque farce.” Wilson dies at the height of his celebrity, trampled by Kong, and Dwan is ultimately a victim of her own fame as well. As the picture ends, Dwan is accosted by hundred of photographers, all snapping photographs, all wanting her, expecting her, to behave in a certain way. Jack is unable to reach her in this mob, and the point is established visually by Guillermin’s composition: Fame is isolating.

Dwan, the center of attention, is now out of reach from those who would choose to love her. Dwan has finally achieved her wish of celebrity, but the high-angle shot of her standing surrounded in a circle of flashbulbs and paparazzi suggests she should have been more careful what she wished for. She prostituted herself to achieve this fame, sacrificed Kong, and now she is fame’s whore—important perhaps as part of a “breaking” story, but ultimately alone and unloved. The two men in her life (Kong and Jack) can no longer protect her.

Thus the new *Kong* ends on a down-note. The exploited Kong is dead, just a bit more (hairy) grist for the New York press; Jack hates Dwan for her role in Kong’s death; and Dwan is isolated and rejected, except by those who see her as the flavor of the week. Again, this is a contrast to the romantic idealism of the original picture, which culminates in Kong’s death and the love between Ann Darrow and Jack Driscoll cemented. Even the exploiter, Carl Denham, survives in this version ... unpunished for his sins. So again, new *Kong* is more mature in its storytelling because its characters travel through a believable human arc, and come out of the experience changed ... in typical 1970s fashion, for the worse.

In toto, there is actually a great deal to admire in this version of *King Kong*. John Barry’s bombastic score captures the majesty of the story and the mystery of Skull Island. The location footage shot in Hawaii is grand and awe-inspiring in a way that the lush (but studio-bound) forest of the original is not. Even the film’s background exposition is deftly handled in a clever two-faced briefing led by Wilson and Prescott that establishes previous encounters with Kong, or Kong-like creatures in 1605, 1749, and 1944! Also, it is a relief to note that this is no 90-minute rush job.

This *King Kong* takes its time, clocking in at well over two hours in length, and it does not rush to achieve its effects or get to King Kong. Instead, it adopts a measured pace in recording the journey of the Petrox Explorer, and there is a long, slow (but effective) build-up to the great ape's first appearance, thus priming the audience.

Even the closeted, sexual underpinnings of the 1933 *Kong* have been opened up. A priest clad as an ape thrusts his pelvis suggestively at Dwan, and Kong disrobes his "prize" in an erotic "strip" sequence. There is no doubt, here, that Dwan is to be the bride of Kong in all facets of that word.

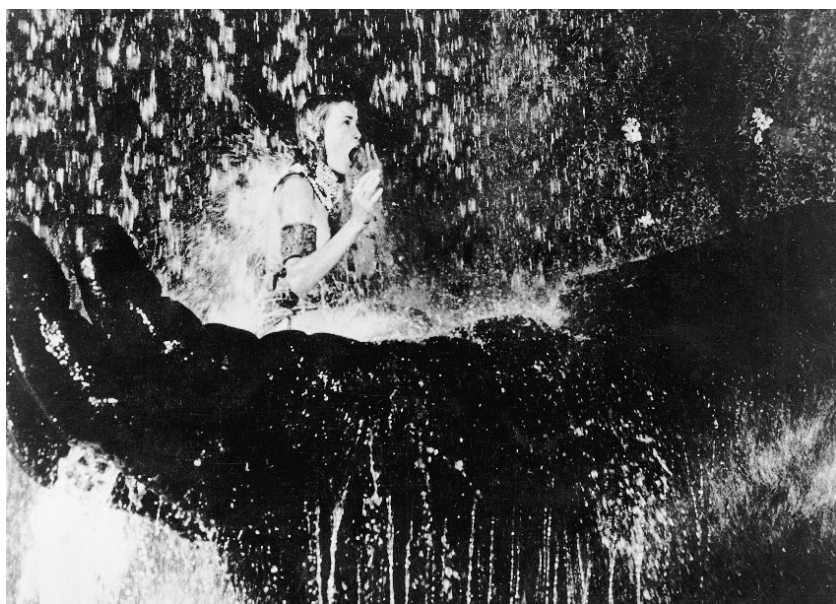
The humor in the new *King Kong* also works rather ably, though this element of the picture alienated many of the *Kong* faithful. Before leaving dock, Wilson proposes a toast to the "big one." Later, on Skull Island, he declares "let's not get eaten alive on this island ... bring out the bug spray." And, in one delightfully self-referential moment, Prescott follows Kong's path, and asks his mates "who do you think went through here, some guy in an ape suit?" This tongue-in-cheek approach to the material works well because the characters are not actually mocking Kong. Instead, they are spouting appropriate dialogue that only an "in the know" audience, familiar with the legend, would find amusing. This is, in fact, the same tone that found such immense favor in Wes Craven's *Scream*.

Importantly, the characters in the film never react to the great ape or their jeopardy with laughter, and the self-referential humor quotient welcomes those viewers who, in the "realism-obsessed" 1970s, might have a bit of trouble with the notion of a giant ape. This brand of humor is also in evidence in *Tremors* (1989), and the aforementioned *Scream*, but *King Kong* was derided by many for its inclusion. People said that the film didn't have enough "awe" and "respect" for King Kong, as if the hairy beast were a religious messiah.

Probably no remake could match the first *King Kong* in pure originality or inspiration. It is a masterpiece of adventure filmmaking. The 1976 version attempts to avoid invidious comparisons by playing its symphony in a different key. It is anti-romantic and humorous instead of straight-faced and idealistic. It is

cynical about human nature instead of optimistic. It is an anti-fairy tale to contrast the original's fairy tale, which even ended with a reference to *Beauty and the Beast*.

Seen in this light, *King Kong* is an interesting and valuable remake because it attempts to expand and re-imagine Kong's universe rather than merely rehash what came before. Accordingly then, many of the set pieces which hark directly back to the 1933 version fall flat in the repetition. Kong dispatches several sailors who are crossing a fallen log at one point, in a scene that is a pale (and inferior) imitation of that memorable sequence in the original.



Dwan (Jessica Lange) gets a bath, courtesy of a giant ape in *King Kong* (1976).

Likewise, the new Kong's tussle with a (fakey) giant snake is not even in the same ballpark as the incredible stop-motion dinosaur fights of the original. In head-to-head competition with a classic, the new *Kong* simply doesn't make it, and the scenes that attempt to rival those in the original reveal the folly of the enterprise. Instead, in taking the same story and exploring other ways to tell it, it is actually rather creative.

Where the new *Kong* really succeeds is in the humanization and sentimentalizing of Kong (in the conclusion, literally a little guy fighting city hall), and its corresponding de-sentimentalizing of the human characters. This cynical, post-Watergate, post-Vietnam, energy crisis-era *King Kong* is as much a product and reflection of its time as was the original, but in the new century, it is the 1970s *Kong* that resonates more deeply. Kosovo, the Clinton impeachment, the oil shortage of 2000—these are all “remakes” of ’70s issues, aren’t they? And so the Guillermin *King Kong* seems more timely than ever before. And, in an age where CGI monsters evoke little feeling, this Kong still manages to pull at the heart. He may appear low-tech, but in the age of Jar-Jar Binks, low-tech isn’t such a bad thing, is it?

LEGACY: *King Kong* (1976) came to be the most-reviled re-make in genre history ... at least until *Godzilla* was voided into theaters in 1998. *Kong* was badly received by longtime fans of the 1933 original, but was a monster success with general audiences, nonetheless. It quickly became one of the biggest hits of the mid-1970s.

Ever the optimist, Dino De Laurentiis plunged ahead with an ill-advised sequel, *King Kong Lives* (1986) starring Linda Hamilton, but learned nothing from the missteps of his first remake. That film was a financial as well as critical bomb.

***Martin* (1976) * * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: John Amplas (Martin); Lincoln Maazel (Cuda); Christine Forrest (Christina); Elyane Nadeau (Mrs. Santini); Tom Savini (Arthur); Sarah Venable (Housewife Victim); Fran Middleton (Train Victim); Al Levitsky (Lewis); George A. Romero (Father Howard); James Roy (Deacon); J. Clifford Forrest Jr. (Father Zalemas); Robert Ogden (Businessman); Donaldo Soviero (Flashback Priest); Donna Siegal (Woman); Albert J. Schmaus, Lillian Schmaus, Frances Mazzoni (Family); Vincent D.

Survinski (Train Porter); Tony Buba, Pasquale Buba, Clayton McKinnon (Drug Dealers); Regis J. Survinski, Tony Pantanella (Hobos); Harvey Eger, Tony Weber (Men in Bathroom); Robert Barner, Stephen Fergelic (Police); Douglas Serence, Jeanne Serene (Cyclists); Nick Mastandrea, John Sozansky (Marien); Ingeborg Forrest (Mrs. Anderson); Carol McCloskey (Mrs. Bellini).

CREW: A Laurel Presentation. *Music Composed and Arranged by:* Donald Rubinstein. *Recorded at:* Triton Studio, Boston. *Engineer:* Jay Mandell. *Director of Photography:* Michael Gornick. *Produced by:* Richard Rubinstein. *Written and Directed by:* George A. Romero. *Post-production Supervisor:* Michael Gornick. *Post-production Assistant:* Michael DiLauro, Ed Keen. *Sound:* Tony Buba. *Assistant Cameramen:* Tom Dubinsky, Nick Mastandrea. *Grips:* Steve Lalich, Phillip Desiderio. *Special Effects and Make-up:* Tom Savini. *Technical Assistants:* Regis J. Survinsky, Tony Pantanella. *Associate Producers:* Patricia Bernesser, Ray Schmaus. *Production Coordinator:* Joyce Weber. *Assistant to Producer:* Donna Siegal. *Color:* WRS Lab, Pittsburgh. *Titles:* The Animators, Inc., Pittsburgh. A Laurel Presentation. From Braddock Associates. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

P.O.V.

"*Martin* is about all the monsters of the world, proposing that they are simply extensions or exaggerations of a strain present in all of us"³¹.— George Romero, on his modern vampire film *Martin* (1976).

SYNOPSIS: A troubled teen named Martin believes himself to be a vampire. He stalks a woman on a train, fancying the average-looking commuter to be a regal princess, as he renders her unconscious with a hypodermic of tranquilizers. He then slits her

wrists with a razor blade and drinks her blood.

Martin gets off the train at Pittsburgh and meets his new caretaker, the old relative called Cuda. Cuda is highly superstitious and believes that vampirism runs in his family. He disdains Martin, considering him “Nosferatu,” and threatens to stake him through the heart should the boy assault anybody in his city. At Cuda's place, Martin makes a friend in Cuda's liberated and unexpectedly rational granddaughter, Christina.

Martin is hired at Cuda's deli, and delivers meat to bored housewives throughout the neighborhood. In particular, he senses that one of the housewives, Mrs. Santini, wants to have sex with him, but Martin has never had sex with a conscious, willing partner, and is nervous. By night, Martin frequents sex shops and seeks new victims. As he attacks locals and kills them in his unique “vampiric” fashion, Martin even becomes something of a celebrity as the “Count” on a local radio talk show. Martin calls in to the host to give his side of the story, and enjoys the attention.

Worried about Martin's propensity to drink blood, Cuda invites a priest to come to dinner at his house and exorcise the boy. The priest, a contemporary kind of guy, doesn't believe in demons and such, but subscribes instead to such modern ideas as psychology and mental illness. After the priest departs, Martin dresses up like a vampire to terrify Cuda.

Sometime later, Martin takes a big step and has sexual intercourse with Mrs. Santini. His healthy sexual relationship with the woman stalls his need to drink blood, and his murders stop for a time. But then Cuda and Christine have a fight and she leaves town with her philandering boyfriend, Arthur. Upset, Martin returns to his violent ways. He bungles an attack on one woman and goes after two drunks to make up for it. This time, he is nearly caught by the police, but manages an escape.

Mrs. Santini commits suicide and a saddened Martin resolves not to have friends anymore, since they all end up leaving him. Martin wakes up one morning to find Cuda over his bed. Cuda stakes him through the heart, punishing him—ironically—for the one crime he didn't commit: the murder of Mrs. Santini. Believing her death was

arranged by Martin to look like suicide, Cuda kills the Nosferatu in his midst and buries him in the backyard. On the local talk shows, disc jockeys wonder what ever happened to the "Count."

COMMENTARY: In *Martin* (1976), zombie-master George A. Romero is out to deconstruct the legend of the vampire, and he succeeds admirably in that quest. His film is a measured, provocative essay about the differences between myth (often filmed in black and white to reflect the Dracula films of Universal in the 1930s and 40s), and reality (shown in contrasting '70s color). In addition to de-romanticizing movie vampirism, Romero also deconstructs something else, something a bit more sacred: organized religion. This opportunity to destroy cherished icons (vampires and religion) is taken in a remarkably cohesive and moving character study of an outsider, a boy victimized by both his belief in myths, and his status as a "despised one" by his family's religion.

In *Jack's Wife* (1971), Romero went to some pains to establish how the "powers" of witchcraft could also be interpreted as a matter of happenstance, coincidence, or fate. In that film, a bored housewife imagined herself a witch, but it may have been merely her increased self-confidence rather than supernatural spells that changed her life to her liking. In *Martin*, Romero plays the same sport, dramatizing in blunt-faced fashion how there is no "magic" in human reality, only, at most, a synchronicity of unlikely events that either help or hinder an individual who "believes" there is a greater power. In *Martin*, that greater power is the lore of the vampire. Martin uses his belief in "vampires" to empower and embolden himself, but at the same time, reality is quite far from romantic images of the vampire at work.

The gap between fantasy imagery and reality is spelled out for viewers in Romero's first sequence, in which Martin stalks a victim on a train. There is nothing romantic whatsoever about this attack. Martin finds not a beautiful maiden in white, awaiting his mesmerizing advances. Instead, a toilet flushes in a cramped train compartment, and an average-looking woman with a mask of face cream emerges from the bathroom. Importantly, this remarkably non-beautiful woman does not give herself freely to Martin. Instead,

she fights every inch of the way, never surrendering to the “charm” of the vampire.

Following through on the logical line of this scene, Romero provides a clinical look at Martin’s post-attack clean up. He wipes up blood in the sink and tidies the compartment instead of ascending into the night as a bat, or a powerful lover sated. This is, in all senses, a kitchen sink vampire.

The gulf between reality and fiction is one of *Martin’s* ongoing motifs. In one of his later fantasies, Martin imagines himself approaching a fantasy victim on a bed. She is garbed in silky nightgown and awaiting his caress. In reality, this woman is busy having sexual intercourse with another man. Someone beat Martin to the punch...

In another black-and-white fantasy, Martin imagines himself in a castle instead of a 1970s pad, and again there is the notion that he is incapable of synthesizing his unromantic reality with the heroic legend of the vampire. “There is no real magic. There is no real magic, ever,” he notes at one point in the film, affirming that Hollywood magic is just lies.

Yet Martin buys into the lies. Just as many Christians believe firmly in the Resurrection, the transubstantiation of communion, and divine intervention, Martin still places stock in the canned, false images of his “religion”—the Hollywood vampire. Oddly, Martin is smart enough to realize that he is deluded in his fantasies. When he dresses up as a movie vampire, he notes that it is “only a costume.” Martin’s competing knowledge is the crux of the picture. He wants to be one thing, but knows he is something else.

Romero’s desire to demystify the vampire goes further. The setting of his “vampire” film is not the far-flung Carpathian mountains in scenic Transylvania. Instead, this tale is told in the seamy, industrial city of Pittsburgh. It looks like a dying world even before the vampire, Martin, arrives. The people of this world are equally unromantic. There is no beautiful damsel in distress, no heroic Van Helsing doctor, and no charming creature of the night. Instead, this is a world of delis, bored housewives, adultery, and suburban malaise. The greatest horror here is the boredom and

disenchantment of married America.

Christian religion is also viewed in empty terms. The director himself portrays a priest who does not believe in demons. He is a fan of *The Exorcist*, and goes on and on about it. "I don't suppose you saw that movie? I thought it was *great!*" he enthuses. Likewise, when an exorcism is performed on Martin, it is a rote, empty proceeding by an old man who continues to read from his prayer book after Martin has left the room!

The stab against organized religion is deeper than a depiction of a "chic" priest or a failed ritual. Cuda is a religious man, and in the end, kills his own blood, Martin, because he believes religion demands it. Religion has twisted him so badly that he believes murder is acceptable. Cuda believes that Martin is a vampire, that his family is cursed by vampirism, and that it is his duty to destroy the evil. Basically, he commits a sin against his own relation in the name of God. It doesn't really matter whether Martin is guilty of any crimes or not. He is a murderer, and a sick man, but the hypocrisy of most organized religions is that "zealots" believe it is right to wage war, kill and commit atrocities in the name of their lord and savior. It's analogous to the situation of those who define themselves as pro-life yet believe in the death penalty. Or those that bomb abortion clinics to save the lives of others. It is death in the name of God, it is hypocritical, and it is wrong. In the end, Cuda kills Martin for a crime he didn't commit. That seems to indicate that Martin's own sins are immaterial. Cuda would have killed him regardless of his guilt, because he believed the word of his God allowed him to do so.

Martin is really a movie about a sick family. A patriarch's belief in religion has twisted him, and the "child's" belief in myth (vampirism) has likewise done the same to him. "In real life, you can't get people to do what you want them to do," Martin notes with a sense of disappointment. In that bit of dialogue, he is acknowledging that religion, or even images in a movie, are methods of imposing control or ideas on society at large. People rebel against that, whether the directive is coming from government, a priest, or a "socially-conscious" director. In the end, Romero is saying, we are all victims of the images and ideas we're

exposed to. Religion can warp personalities, and so can delusions of grandeur. Martin may not be a vampire, but his quest to be one has made him a monster anyway.

One of the great things about Romero's films is that the supernatural has little place in them. There's a throwaway explanation for the horror in *Night of the Living Dead* (radiation from the Venus probe). In *Jack's Wife*, there is no witchcraft, only the desire to believe in something. In *The Crazies*, a mental illness results in insanity ... but there are no supernatural "zombies." That central theme is carried over into *Martin* with remarkable success, and Romero has provided audiences with a hero that wants to be a vampire. The question is pertinent: why? The answer is that Martin is lonely and shy, and that he admires the power of the vampire. To be loved by women, to be feared by enemies, to be desired as a lover ... these are all things that the outsider can never have. Though he doesn't get these things in the manner a "real" vampire would (through fangs, mesmerism, transformations *et cetera*), he finds the logical, scientific alternatives in a world without magic. A tranquilizer can sedate as easily as hypnosis, a razor blade functions as well as fangs, and so on. The only thing Martin did not count on was the fact that vampires and humans faced one weakness in common: a stake through the heart kills both. It is ironic that in death, Martin has finally accomplished what he sought all along. He has become a vampire, if only in the mind of the sick Cuda, and is sent from this mortal coil in the manner of his "hero." Through the use of crosscutting and stylistic choices Romero artfully tells the story of a boy who wanted to be a vampire ... and who, in the end, died as one.

***Obsession* (1976) * * ***

Critical Reception

"A glossy puzzler ... while Bujold is touching, DePalma's first attempt to mimic grand melodrama ends up smelling like camp...."—Ty Burr, *Entertainment Weekly*: "Hitchcraft," January 15, 1993, page 56.

"Garbage of a special stench... Even as parody, which it isn't it, it could be rotten.... DePalma has smothered the film with stupidly heavy camerawork...."—Stanley Kauffman, *New Republic*, September 18, 1976, pages 24–25.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Cliff Robertson (Michael Courtland); Geneviève Bujold (Elizabeth/Amy/Sandra); John Lithgow (Bob DeSalle); With: Sylvia Williams, Wanda Blackman, Patrick McNamara, Stanley J. Reyes, Nick Kriegher, Stocker Fonteliou, Don Hood, Andrea Esterhazy, Thomas Carr, Tom Felleghy, Nella Simoncin Barbier, John Creamer, Regid Cordic, Loraine Despres, Clyde Venture, Fain McCogrove.

CREW: A George Little Production of a Brian DePalma Film, *Obsession*. *Production Manager:* Frank Beetson. *Assistant Directors:* William Pool, Bob Bender. *Art Director:* Jack Senter. *Set Dresser:* Jerry Wunderlich. *Visual Consultant:* Anne Pritchard. *Camera Operator:* Nick McLean. *Script Supervisor:* Hannah Scheel. *Property Master:* William Wainess. *Costume Supervisor:* Frank Balchus. *Sound Mixer:* David Bonne. *Sound Editor:* Dan Sable. *Assistant Film Editors:* Deborah Boldt, Candace Grudzien. *Special Effects:* Joe Lombardi, Special Effects Unlimited. *Production Assistant:* Alan Stern. *Assistant Producer:* Joe Regan. *Editor:* Paul Hirsch. *Music:* Bernard Herrmann. *Executive Producer:* Robert S. Bremson. *Director of Photography:* Vilmos Zsigmond. *Story:* Brian DePalma, Paul Scharder. *Screenplay by:* Paul Schrader. *Produced by:* George Litto and Harry N. Blum. *Directed by:* Brian DePalma. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 98 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In New Orleans in 1959, Michael and Elizabeth Courtland celebrate the tenth anniversary of their wedding with

their little daughter, Amy, at a lavish house party. After the guests have left for the evening, Elizabeth and Amy are kidnapped from the Courtland home and ransomed for \$500,000 dollars. Michael is warned not to involve the authorities, but he calls the police, and Inspector Bree takes over the case. Bree doesn't permit Michael to pay the ransom and instead sends fake money and a radio transmitter to the criminals. When the criminals learn of the doublecross, they flee with their hostages. Their car is destroyed in a fire, with Courtland's wife and child presumed dead inside. A grieving Michael then builds an elaborate tomb for his dead family on the new park grounds he has purchased with his aggressive business partner, Bob DeSalle.

In 1975, an older, sadder Courtland still visits the park where the monument to his wife and daughter stands. When he takes a business trip to Florence with Bob, he visits the church where he first met Elizabeth so many years earlier. Inside, he unexpectedly runs into a young church painter, Sandra, who is a dead ringer for the dead Elizabeth. Obsessed, Courtland spends a day following Sandra about, and then finally meets her. She is a young Italian working on the church restoration, and agrees to lunch with the American stranger. Before long, Bob and Sandra are emotionally involved, even though she is told of her resemblance to Elizabeth. After a whirlwind romance, Sandra and Michael agree to return to the States to be married.

Back in New Orleans, Michael's business associates are upset that he has taken up with a young woman he knows nothing about. Meanwhile, Sandra finds a locked master bedroom in the Courtland house filled with the memories and artifacts of a life with Elizabeth and Amy. As Michael obsesses about Sandra, so too does Sandra obsess about becoming Elizabeth for Michael—a living Doppelgänger of his dead wife.

Before Michael and Sandra can be married, something terrible happens: Sandra leaves the same ransom note from 1959 in Amy's bedroom, and then disappears. Unwilling to make the same mistake twice, Michael sells his half of the business to Bob and meets the ransom demand for his new wife. This second chance to right the mistakes of 1959 goes badly, however, when Bob switches the

money on Michael, thinking him insane. Desperate, Michael soon learns the truth: Bob was working with Sandra to swindle Michael out of his assets! Angry, Courtland murders Bob and heads to the airport to intercept Sandra. Armed with a pistol, Michael wants to kill his duplicitous lover...

At the airport, Courtland prepares to kill Sandra when the last bit of the equation is finally revealed to him. Sandra is actually his long-lost daughter, Amy. She survived the kidnapping all those years ago, was moved to Italy by Bob, and has been waiting to wreak her revenge on the father who sold her out to the crooks.

COMMENTARY: *Obsession* is a throwback to the twist/surprise oriented films that master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock directed in Hollywood's yesteryear. Today, a film like this is called "homage," but Brian DePalma's career has proven that films like *Obsession* are, for him, more than simple homages or rip-offs. For as surely as Cliff Robertson's character, Courtland, is obsessed with his mistake in the past, and as surely as Lithgow's character is obsessed with money, DePalma is obsessed with Hitchcock. Later in his career, he would re-invent *Psycho* as *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Rear Window* (1954) as *Body Double* (1984). It is not hard to view *Obsession*, then, as his *Vertigo* (1958), although there are elements of several Hitchcock films at work in this picture.

DePalma's admiration for Hitchcock's *oeuvre* plays out across the board in technique, character and plot in *Obsession*. In the first case, DePalma probes scenes with an icy, slow detachment, yet always with a sense of purpose and forward momentum. One may question what the larger purpose is here, but it is deceptively simple. DePalma is purely and simply trying to tell the story as Hitchcock would have told it. Slow motion photography and a spinning camera play a crucial role in the climax, and some may argue it is showy purely for the sake of showmanship, but DePalma has an understanding of Hitchcock's core filmic conceit, that the camera should express rather than merely record.

Once upon a time, before CGI and \$100 million budgets, there was a debate about film, and how to make them. Realistic directors sought to record their stories, letting audiences draw conclusions about what was important. Conversely, formalist directors

understood that the camera could express emotions, generate suspense, and heighten the intensity of film. Hitchcock was the greatest formalist the industry has ever seen because he understood how film technique could be combined to forge powerful feelings in viewers. DePalma is not Hitchcock's equal in *Obsession*, but he is adhering to the same beliefs, and probing at the boundaries of formalist filmmaking. Like Hitchcock, he wants the audience to feel first and foremost, and think second. Where DePalma and Hitchcock may truly differ is that Hitchcock was able to successfully achieve the "thinking" bit too, being extremely witty at the same time his camera was doing outrageous things. His set pieces always had a wicked humor to them. DePalma is more straight-faced and studious in his approach. Sometimes he doesn't quite reach the effects he strives for, and it may be because he is lacking in the wit that made Hitchcock stand apart.

The characters in *Obsession* might also have come out of Hitchcock's film stable. Cliff Robertson is solidly in the Cary Grant/ James Stewart/Rod Taylor leading-man vein. He is stolid and dependable, and attractive in a kind of aristocratic way. He is a throwback to the 1950s movie hero in many ways, from his "classic" good looks to his defining lack of "edge." Stolid is the best word for the actor, and this character. He keeps his emotions close to the vest, and even when obsessed is not into histrionics or other displays of temper and personality.

Sandra (Geneviève Bujold) is no doubt a reflection of Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, a woman involved in a plot to undo the hero, but who is nevertheless vulnerable and desirable. She is not a villain, but a pawn. What's interesting is that Bujold is a very different kind of actress than Novak in both appearance and technique. But here, she plays the same role, that of the damaged fawn.

Obsession's plot elements recall various Hitchcock films. The master bedroom that hides the artifacts of a cherished marriage seems a reflection of *Rebecca* (1949). The use of a "dream" woman to manipulate a man is straight from *Vertigo*, as are the many scenes of a man "mourning." The intrigue angle could have come from any Hitchcock thriller, and the dangerous love of a woman—the obsession of the title—is also reflective of *Vertigo*. Though Cliff

Robertson doesn't suffer from vertigo, or any other illness, he is nonetheless "paralyzed" by the mistake he made, the one that robbed him of his wife and daughter all those years earlier.

Many critics took potshots at *Obsession*, and accused it of offering Hitchcock leftovers. There may be a point there, and there is little doubt that this film is not of the same standard as DePalma's brilliant *Carrie* or his crazy *Sisters* (1973). Yet, why does every film have to meet a certain set of criteria? If DePalma wanted to update the 1950s Hitchcock thriller into the mid-1970s, that seems a noble enough pursuit. What is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, after all, but a revamp of all those 1930s cliff-hanging serials? What is *Star Wars* but a mix of 1950s Kurosawa films and 1930s Flash Gordon movies? Perhaps too much was expected of *Obsession*. It is an homage, pure and simple, and quite a successful one. It isn't very original, but how could it be, considering the reflections of Hitchcock? *Raiders* and *Star Wars* aren't original either ... but they are good films.

So is *Obsession*.

Old Dracula

Cast & Crew

CAST: David Niven (Dracula); Teresa Graves (Countess Vampire); Peter Bayliss (Maltravars); Jennie Linden (Angela); Nicky Henson (Marc).

CREW: *Directed by:* Clive Donner. *Screenplay by:* Jeremy Lord. *Produced by:* Jack H. Wiener. *Director of Photography:* Tony Richmond. American International Pictures. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

DETAILS: David Niven plays the immortal bloodsucker in this serio-comic tale hoping to cash in on the success of Gene Wilder's *Young Frankenstein*. The plot involves Dracula growing long in the tooth and requiring a rare blood type to revive his long-dead vampire mate. To maintain a regular flux of visitors (and keep searching for

that blood type), the count opens up his castle to tourists. Niven is a delight, and Graves is beautiful, but this is on no one's list of best vampire movies.

The Omen (1976) * * * ½

Critical Reception

"...properly ominous and ideally suited for hot weather viewing because it is so chilling.... While the film's theological leverage is precarious ... the plot generally unfolds convincingly for purposes of coherent entertainment. The photographic effects are spectacular, to say the least ... comparison with *The Exorcist* is ... inevitable. *The Omen* takes the laurels as it is infinitely more subtle in its horror, and ... more elegant as regards visual detail."—Dorothy Dean, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVII, Number 7, August-September 1976, page 440.

"...a member of the *Exorcist* family, it is a dreadfully silly film, which is not to say that it is totally bad ... the movie is reasonably well-paced. We don't have time to brood about the silliness of any particular scene before we are on to the next."—Richard Eder, *New York Times*, June 26, 1976, page 16.

"Gregory Peck, as Ambassador Thorn, often sinks to the level of pompous self-parody.... His delivery is punctuated by so many lengthy and 'dramatic' pauses that at times we are left to wonder whether the great actor has fallen asleep."—Michael and Harry Medved, *The Fifty Worst Movies of All Time*, Warner Books, 1978, page 173.

"...not worth anyone's two hours or two dollars. For a start, Hollywood and its actors have no resources, emotional, dramatic or intellectual, to draw on for this sort of subject matter and hence

have to draw on their usual bag of melodrama, sentimentalism and sham-horror.... Gregory Peck may have talent, but he is miscast here.”—Thomas Howard, *Christianity Today*, August 6, 1976, page 9.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Gregory Peck (Ambassador Robert Thorn); Lee Remick (Katherine Thorn); David Warner (Keith Jennings); Billie Whitelaw (Mrs. Baylock); Patrick Troughton (Father Brennan); Martin Benson (Father Spiletto); Harvey Stephens (Damien); Robert Rietty (Monk); Tommy Duggan (Priest); Leo McKern (Bugenhagen); John Stride (the Psychiatrist); Anthony Nicholls (Dr. Becker); Holly Palance (Nanny); Roy Boyd (Reporter); Freda Dowle (Nun); Sheila Rayner (Mrs. Horton); Robert MacLeod (Horton); Bruce Bea (Thorn's Aide); Don Fellows (Thorn's Second); Patrick McAlinney (Photographer); Dawn Perlman (Chambermaid); Nancy Manningham (Nurse); Betty McDowall (American Secretary); Nicholas Campbell (Marine); Byrnell Tucker (Secret Service Man); Ronald Leigh-Hunt (Gentleman at Rugby Match); Guglielmo Spotelini (Italian Taxi Driver); Yakov Banai (Arab); and the Officers and Men of the United States Marine Barracks, London, England.

CREW: 20th Century–Fox Presents a Harvey Bernhard-Mace Neufeld Production, *The Omen*. *Director of Photography:* Gilbert Taylor. *Art Director:* Carmen Dillon. *Editor:* Stuart Baird. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Associate Producer:* Charles Orme. *Executive Producer:* Mace Neufeld. *Written by:* David Seltzer. *Produced by:* Harvey Bernhard. *Directed by:* Richard Donner. *Religious Advisers:* Robert Munge, Reverend Don Williams, Ph.D. *Assistant Art Director:* George Richardson. *Casting:* Maude Spector. *Production Manager:* Claude Hudson. *Special Effects:* John Richardson. *Location Manager:* Bernard

Hansen. *Assistant Director*: David Tomblin. *Camera Operator*: Gerry Anstiss. *Continuity*: Elaine Schreyeck. *Set Dresser*: Tessa Davies. *Stunt Coordinator*: Alf Joint. *Sound Recordist*: Gordon Everett. *Dubbing Editor*: Les Wiggins. *Dialogue Editor*: Chris Lancaster. *Assistant Editor*: Chris Ridsdale. *Wardrobe Supervisor*: Glen Nicholls. *Chief Make-up*: Stuart Freeborn. *Hairdresser*: Pat McDermott. *Property Master*: George Ball. *Dogs Owned and Trained by*: Ben and Joan Woodgate. *Automobiles Furnished by*: Ford Motor Company. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *Color by*: DeLuxe. *Processed by*: Rank Film Laboratories. *Titles*: National Screen Services Limited, London. *Music Recorded at*: Music Centre, England. Made by 20th Century–Fox Productions Limited at Shepperton Studio Centre, England, and on location. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 111 minutes.

P.O.V.

"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666."—Book of Revelation, Chapter 13, Verse 18.

"My demise was kind of fun. It was shot in three different locations to edit together. One was in Israel, one was in the Studio, and the head was a special shot"³².—Actor David Warner sounds off on his infamous decapitation in *The Omen* (1976).

SYNOPSIS: On June 6, Ambassador Robert Thorn of the United States rushes to a hospital in Rome as his wife, Kathy, gives birth to their first child there. In a tragic moment, the Thorn baby dies, and the ambassador is left with a grim and difficult choice. Should he tell his wife, who will surely be devastated by the loss, or pull off a deception instead? A local priest suggests that Thorn replace his dead baby with a live, motherless child, who was also born that very night. Not wishing to see his wife suffer, Thorn makes the

switch and keeps it a secret. Before long, husband and wife are celebrating the birth of “their” child, Damien.

Five years later, Thorn has become the ambassador to England, and moved to an opulent home near London. At Damien's fifth birthday party, tragedy strikes as the boy's governess jumps from a roof and hangs herself, claiming that the act is “for Damien.” After this grisly event, a priest, Father Brennan of Rome, visits Thorn at his office and offers some shocking news. He was present in the Italian hospital the night of Damien's birth and knows that the boy's natural mother was not a human being at all, but a jackal!

Meanwhile, a nosy photographer, Keith Jennings, hovers around the Thorn family snapping pictures, and a new governess, Mrs. Baylock, arrives at the house to care for Damien. Almost immediately, Baylock takes over the leadership role in raising Damien and even gets him a pet—a slobbering, evil dog. As Damien grows, Thorn notes his increasingly odd behavior. The boy shows an abject fear of churches and is unnaturally close to Mrs. Baylock. And, animals at a zoo/safari run from him in terror as if he is some kind of monster.



An angry Gregory Peck accosts Patrick Troughton about the nature of his adopted son, Damien, in *The Omen* (1976).

Father Brennan meets with Thorn again and the priest offers a horrifying explanation: Damien is the Antichrist, the son of the Devil! Brennan tells Thorn that he must meet with a man named Bugenhagen in Israel to end this matter soon, but Thorn still believes Brennan to be a crazy zealot. Brennan also warns that Damien will kill any biological Thorn heir, fearing a loss of his inheritance. This means nothing to Thorn until he learns that Kathy is, indeed, pregnant. Catastrophe follows catastrophe as Damien accidentally “pushes” Kathy from a ledge, and she loses the baby in

the fall. Then Father Brennan dies in a freak storm: impaled on a weather vane.

Photographer Keith Jennings thinks he has found a bizarre clue and shares it with Thorn. In each photograph he took of Father Brennan and the Thorn's first nanny, there were phantom images. In the nanny's case, a rope was visible around her neck ... before she hanged. And, in three separate photos of Father Brennan, all taken on different days, a phantom spike was seen intersecting his body. Jennings is fearful because he has taken his own picture, and it shows something sharp cutting right through his neck.



Patrick Troughton (as Father Brennan) gets Damien's point in *The Omen* (1976).

Together, Thorn and Jennings launch a pilgrimage to learn the truth of Damien's genesis. They travel to Rome only to learn that the hospital where Damien was born has burned to the ground along with all birth certificates and records. Jennings and Thorn then track down the priest who arranged the baby trade in the first place. He is paralyzed, scarred, mute and half-alive in a nearby monastery. He is able to scrawl out a clue for the searchers: he points them to an old Etruscan cemetery nearby. There, buried in the ancient ground is the corpse of Damien's biological mother: a jackal. And beside the corpse is the body of Thorn's real child: a tiny human baby who was actually murdered! A pack of dogs attack the two men at the cemetery, and Thorn and Jennings barely escape with their lives.

Worried, Thorn telephones London and orders Kathy to pack up her

things and leave immediately, lest Damien and Baylock strike at her again. Kathy makes preparations to leave the hospital where she has been recuperating following her fall, but Miss Baylock intercepts her and pushes her out a high window ... killing her. Thorn learns of his wife's death, and decides it is time to follow through on Brennan's advice. He and Jennings make for Israel, where they meet with the exorcist and archaeologist Bugenhagen.

Bugenhagen reveals that Damien, the Antichrist, can only be killed on holy ground with a series of ceremonial daggers. Still uncertain, Thorn asks if there is any way he can be absolutely certain that Damien is really the Devil's son. Bugenhagen replies that any minion of the devil will bear the mark of the beast on his body: 666. Soon after the meeting with Bugenhagen, Jennings dies when a sheet of plate glass flies from the back of a truck and decapitates him ... just as his photograph foretold.

Alone now, Thorn races home to London to do his grisly duty. He manages to lock up Damien's guardian dog, and tangles with Mrs. Baylock in a hand-to-hand battle to the death. Finally, Thorn is left to murder a child he believes to be evil. After confirming that Damien bears the 666 mark, Thorn races to a nearby Church with the boy. As he drives there, police see him speeding and pursue. Once he enters the church, Thorn prepares the ceremonial daggers, but just as he is about to stab Damien and complete the ritual that will rid the world of evil, Damien, in sweet voice, begs his father not to commit the act. This delaying tactic is effective and Thorn hesitates just long enough for the police to enter the Church and see him hovering over a little child with a deadly dagger. The police shoot Thorn dead, preventing the Antichrist's demise.

Later, the president of the United States stands alongside little Damien at the funeral of the boy's parents. Having survived the attempt on his life, the evil boy smiles...

COMMENTARY: *The Exorcist* bore many cinematic children, but many of them, such as *House of Exorcism* (1975) and *Beyond the Door* (1975), were shadows of their successful parent. These celluloid children inherited one trait in particular from Friedkin's masterpiece: gore galore. *The Omen* is probably the only offspring of *The Exorcist* to attain both the level of "religious" horror (to some

degree) as its antecedent, as well as the concentration on bloody special effects. As far as the latter is concerned, *The Omen* is remembered for actor David Warner's gory "glass plate" decapitation sequence.

In the late 1960s, *Time* magazine announced that God was dead, and for several years, Hollywood issued a reply. God might be dead, but the Devil was alive and well and playing at your local theater. *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* and other films of this ilk play on the most basic fear of moviegoers in the 1970s. Maybe, just maybe, all those Sunday school lessons were right and the free sex, the drug use, the divorces, the infidelities, and the lies that came with the "new freedom" of the disco era were really a one way ticket to everlasting torment in Hell. As much as audiences did not want to believe this was so, there was that niggling fear that "old time" Religion was right, and there would, literally, be hell to pay. In *The Omen*, the Antichrist is born into the world, but 20th century man is too distracted by political ambition, deception, and pragmatism to notice. Those who do notice die first, before they can fight Satan's child. It is a chilling premise. And "evil children" were also a staple of '70s filmmaking, from the possessed Regan of *The Exorcist* to the mutant babies of *It's Alive* (1973).

The Omen is most interesting in its depiction of evil's spread. Characters make small choices, all bad ones, which give rise to a world in which the Antichrist may flourish. In the opening scenes, Ambassador Thorn involves himself in a conspiracy of lies and deceptions so his dead son may be replaced by another baby. Importantly, he does not tell his wife of the baby switch. Of course, in 1976, most Americans already had a pretty jaded view of politicians, thanks to the Watergate scandal and Richard Nixon's resignation, but the point is deeper here. The devil is in the details, and when good people begin to sin—even a "small" sin like lying—evil will grow.

Interestingly, Damien's evil flourishes because his parents make excuses for his behavior. This is also an important facet of *The Omen*'s central equation. At the same time the film wants viewers to understand that Thorn is not a particularly principled person, it acknowledges that he is human, and a parent, and thus worthy of

empathy. In Thorn's blatant denial of Damien's true nature, there is a parable about contemporary parents who can be blind to the bad in their children, no matter what the signs. It is easy to ignore odd behavior, isn't it? Finally, when that behavior becomes so egregious as to stand out, the parents have an excuse—the child is an alien, or evil, or the Antichrist! Anyone who has been a parent can sympathize with the Thorns' predicament in *The Omen*. They can't face the truth about their "child," any more than those poor parents on the nightly news can understand why their offspring engaged in bloody shoot-outs, or were arrested for using drugs, or were charged with rape while at college. Thus another fear at work in *The Omen* is that of the parent making mistakes while raising a child. Who is to blame? What would you do if you learned your child was a monster?

Ironically, the opposite side of this equation is played out in *The Omen* as well. Our society gives children the benefit of the doubt, and here that is a mistake. When Thorn finally takes action, and in a disturbing scene tries to murder his baby, he is killed by the police. All Thorn's allies have died, so he ends the film as a raving madman trying to kill a baby. Of course, he was trying to save the world, but society just saw another abusive, monstrous father hurting his child. He dies for his crime, and the evil child goes on.

Many critics disparaged *The Omen* when it was released, though it was a huge hit with audiences. The negative reviews may have been a result of the fact that *The Omen* knowingly plays on the human propensity to believe in nonsense. Fox TV's *Alien Autopsy*, the book *The Bible Code*, and the Nostradamus prophecies all have their adherents. Indeed, many people take the words of the Bible absolutely literally. In their eyes, what is written will come to pass ... no ifs, ands, or buts. In other words, humans are pretty gullible creatures. They'll believe in anything, given half a chance, or a shred of reasonable doubt. If Nostradamus predicted an earthquake in the 1990s, and there was an earthquake in 1994, some ardent "believers" feel that Nostradamus saw the future ... when in fact he probably just made a pretty easy guess. Critics are notably disdainful of such "prophecies" because they always want to appear intellectually superior to the art they "review," and would never admit that they have questions about these things too.

The Omen is a powerful horror film because it knowingly and cleverly interprets aspects of Christian belief regarding the ascent of Satan's son. For instance, a comet shines on June 6th, Damien's birthday, just as the Star of Bethlehem signaled the birth of Christ nearly 2000 years earlier. There is also a diabolical trinity, the Devil, the Antichrist and the false prophet. By including such signs, and opening the film with a quote from the Book of Revelation, *The Omen* seeks to unnerve moviegoers, and tap into that irrational "belief" zone in all of us. What if the Bible is correct? What if all the signs of the Antichrist are happening around us, right now? Would we believe them? Heck, would we even notice?

When writing about *The Omen*, one must not ignore the bloody aspects. In depicting a conspiracy of evil forces, the film enthusiastically reveals the consequences of messing with the Devil. Patrick Troughton (as Father Brennan) is impaled on a metal rod in one incredible sequence. In another, it appears that David Warner's head has been severed from his body. These are brilliantly staged and executed stunts, and their impact is powerful.

The best-staged scene, however, is one that involves no gore ... only a real sense of "gathering" evil, and its consequent kinetic energy. Little Damien rides his tricycle in a frenzied circle. On the soundtrack, choral music blares as he bares down on the pedals, concentrating on something deep inside himself. The spinning wheel of the trike is shown in close-up, then intercut with intense close-ups of Damien's face. The spinning, not unlike the form of divination called gyromancy—*going around and round in a circle*—is frenzied, and the notion is visually conveyed that Damien is a coil of energy ready to be released. His evil nanny then opens the door, freeing this evil wind to blow throughout the house, and immediately Damien races into his mother (Lee Remick), pushing her off a second story ledge and consequently killing a threat (his unborn brother). This scene is an exemplary use of film technique replete with frenzied cutting, motion, and a powerful score. Nowhere in the film is the "bottled" energy of the Antichrist released with more drama.

The Omen is certainly not as good a film as *The Exorcist*, but it captures the idea that evil's victory is inevitable. All along the way,

the warriors for good (including Troughton and Warner) are destroyed before they can save the world. In the end, even Peck's protagonist cannot stand up to the powers of darkness, and the film ends with the suggestion that Damien, the evil boy, will become the ward of the United States president. The Antichrist is thus within spitting distance of the most powerful office in the land. It is a frightening idea and the pull of the film towards the inevitable victory of evil is another of its strengths. This film is dark and foreboding, and while viewing it, one is frightened throughout that evil will prevail. It is to Richard Donner's credit that he was able to foster this texture and feel of looming, gathering evil so successfully and totally. That mood of a storm gathering, ready to strike, is, in many senses, stronger than the individual details of the story, and it carries *The Omen* to the status of horror classic.

LEGACY: *The Omen* was another 1970s horror blockbuster in the vein of *The Exorcist*. Its draw was so huge that a novelization of the film's story by David Seltzer even landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for a time! *The Omen's* financial success reinforced Hollywood's belief (founded by *The Exorcist*) that the supernatural could rake in the big bucks. Accordingly, two theatrical sequels (*Damien—Omen II* in 1978, and *The Final Conflict: The Omen III* in 1981) followed. In 1991, a TV sequel, *The Omen IV: The Awakening*, aired on Fox. But that was not the end of the supernatural horrors: films such as *The Sentinel* (1977) and *The Manitou* (1978) followed in the path of *The Omen*, hoping for a little of its devilish success.

Psychic Killer

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jim Hutton (Arnold); Julie Adams (Laura); Paul Burke (Det. Morgan); Nehemiah Persoff (Dr. Gubner); Aldo Ray (Anderson).

CREW: *Directed by:* Raymond Danton. *Written by:* Greydon Glark, Mike Angel, Raymond Danton. *Produced by:* Mardi Rustam. *Cameraman:* Herb Pearl. Avco Embassy Pictures. *M.P.A.A Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

DETAILS: A madman (Hutton) empowered with psychic abilities uses his mind-directed energy to kill a variety of victims (including a butcher, a construction worker, and a nurse), until an in-the-know scientist and believer in the paranormal figures out his *modus operandi*, and a way to stop his rampage.

***Schizo* (1976) * * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: Lynne Frederick (Samantha Faulkner/"Jean"); John Leyton (Haskins); Stephanie Beacham (Beth); John Fraser (Leonard); Jack Watson (Alan Faulkner); Queenie Watts, Trisha Mortimer, Robert Mill, Victor Winding, Pearl Hackney, Lindsay Campbell, Wendy Gilmore, Paul Alexander, Colin Jeavons, Raymond Bowers, Terry Duggan, Diana King, Primi Townsend, Victoria Allum.

CREW: Niles International, William J. Nagy and Maurice Smith Present a Pete Walker Production, *Schizo*. *Screenplay by:* David McGillivray. *Photographed by:* Peter Jessop. *Camera Operator:* Peter Sinclair. *Sound Recordist:* Peter O'Connor. *Follow Focus:* John Metcalfe. *Boom Operators:* Jack Davis, Peter Brown. *First Assistant Director:* Brian Lawrence. *Second Assistant Director:* Glynn Purcell. *Third Assistant Director:* Iain Cassie. *Gaffer:* Ted Davis. *Production Manager:* Edward Dorian. *Production Supervisor:* Clifford Parkes. *Make-up Supervisor:* George Partleton. *Assistant to Producer:* James Kelly. *Post-production Supervisor:* Matt McCarthy. *Art Director:* Chris Burke. *Film Editor:* Alan Brett. *Dubbing Mixer:* Tony Anscombe. *Music:* Stanley Meyers. *Produced and Directed by:* Pete Walker. *Recorded at:* Cine Lingual Sound Studios Ltd. *Filmed in:* Technicolor. Produced entirely on location by Peter Walker (Heritage) Ltd., 68 Wigmore Street, London, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:*

R. *Running Time*: 109 minutes.

P.O.V.

"Schizophrenia—a mental disorder sometimes known as multiple or split personality, characterized by loss of touch with environment and alternation between violent and contrasting behavior patterns."—throaty voice-over narration from the opening sequence of *Schizo* (1976).

SYNOPSIS: In London, popular ice-skater Samantha Gray is stalked by a stranger from her past on the eve of her wedding to Alan Faulkner. At the wedding reception, the stalker leaves a bloody machete next to the wedding cake, terrifying Samantha.

Convinced that a man from her past is after her and has gained entrance to her new home, Samantha visits her psychiatrist, Leonard. She tells him of her past. The stalker is a man named William Haskin and was her mother's lover years ago. According to Samantha, Haskin killed her mother when she was seven, and has recently been released from prison. Leonard doesn't believe Haskin is after Sam, but promises to make inquiries about his whereabouts so as to confirm or deny her story. After the session, an angry (and drunk) Alan visits Leonard and tells him to stay away from Sam. Leonard then makes an important association, and references a book on schizophrenia. Before he can tell anybody what he has figured out, a gloved attacker slits his throat, killing him.

The next morning, Leonard's death is in all the papers, and the police believe he was murdered by a violent patient. Alone in the house, Samantha is terrified when Haskin breaks in and leaves a bloody knife in her bedroom. Police search the house and find no sign of forced entry or bloody implement, causing Sam's friend Beth and Alan to believe she has really gone crazy. Mrs. Wallace, the helpful maid, invites Samantha to a meeting of the Psychic Brotherhood in hopes of learning what Leonard learned before his death. There, Wallace's daughter Joy—a woman of high psychic "receptivity"—channels Leonard's spirit. Leonard claims that his murderer is in the room! The meeting disbands in chaos, and Joy is

killed when someone clubs her to death with a sledgehammer and pushes her body in front of an oncoming bus.

The next morning, Sam hears another intruder in the house while Beth goes to call on Haskin, who she learns is in London at a fleabag hotel. While Sam finds the corpse of Mrs. Wallace (who has been stabbed through the face with a knitting needle...) Beth confronts Haskin and mistakes his pleas for help as aggressive, psychotic behavior. Beth runs home and tells Sam she believes Haskin is the killer.

Before long, Haskin and Samantha have their final confrontation at the mill where Alan works. Haskin reveals that Samantha's real name is Jane and that she is a liar. According to him, she should have gone to prison, not him, because she murdered her own mother. He has come to London not to kill her, but to spur her memory of the dreadful crime with the very weapon she used, hoping she will confess. It seems Samantha is schizophrenic, with one personality acting as a vengeful murderer, and the other entirely unaware of the crimes. Samantha and Haskin scuffle, he falls from a ledge, and is impaled on industrial machinery.

With the “stalker” believed dead, Samantha and Alan go on their long-delayed honeymoon. Beth sees them off, unaware that Samantha has packed a knife just in case she and Alan don't see eye to eye...

COMMENTARY: *Schizo* is a bit long and drawn-out, and some of the character reactions don't seem very natural, but director Peter Walker buoys interest by adding a bizarre supernatural twist in one scene, and decorating the film with a series of ever more outrageous gore murders. The film is no *Psycho* (its obvious model), but it isn't bottom drawer stuff either.

A film like *Schizo* usually succeeds when the director is adept in misleading the audience. Brian DePalma and his “twins” movie, *Sisters* (1973), leap immediately to mind. The trick is to leave enough bread crumbs, enough “hints,” for the audience to see how the “surprise” ending makes sense without actually figuring it out before the denouement. Accordingly, events and characters in *Schizo* are designed primarily to cast suspicion away from Lynne

Frederick's protagonist, Sam ... yet all the while indicating her mental instability. Though Frederick is quite good at playing hysterical (a talent she brought to bear in her *Space: 1999* appearance in "A Matter of Balance") *Schizo's* game of cat and mouse is only partially successful for a few reasons. First, Haskin is such an "obvious" psychopath that the audience immediately disregards him as the murderous culprit. Secondly, Alan, Sam's new husband, disappears for much of the film, so while he may be a suspect for a time, he is often forgotten.

Frankly, this is a film that should have lasted maybe 90 minutes, and some judicious editing would have benefited it enormously. The longer the audience has to catalog suspects, the duller and less surprising the film becomes. By the time the surprise climax is revealed, the audience is no longer urgently concerned with the resolution ... its good will ran out a few twists (and about ten minutes...) earlier.

Give director Peter Walker credit, however, for going to some lengths to maintain audience attention. Though this is a kitchen sink, knife and psychology horror thriller in the mould of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Walker includes a paranormal, or supernatural angle to the proceedings. Specifically, *Schizo* follows Samantha to the services of a medium who channels the spirit of a dead man (Leonard, the psychiatrist), and then accurately (if vaguely) points to the culprit. Oddly, this scene, which may sound completely out of keeping with the rest of the film, is one of the best staged. Joy Wallace, a psychic of "high receptivity." suddenly has a seizure, her eyes bulging and turned stark white as she is possessed by the dead practitioner. It's a shocking, unexpected moment that raises the film's adrenaline level considerably. This scene grants *Schizo* about five extra minutes of excitement, until the audience sags under the realization that it was just a gimmick, and that the psychic angle will not be pursued.

Walker's other strategy in *Schizo* is to go completely beyond the boundaries of realism and good taste in depicting the murderous exploits of his film's killer. This over-the-top sensibility is pretty successful too, creating shock after shock as gory deaths pile up in rapid succession. After beginning subtly with a rusty, bloodied

machete, the film goes into horror overdrive. Leonard is brutally knifed to death in his car, Joy Wallace is clubbed with a sledgehammer. Joy's mother, Mrs. Wallace, even gets a knitting needle through the face in a pretty convincing and gory effects sequence. In these violent scenes, the movie really comes alive in a most visceral sense before settling back down into the hackneyed whodunit format.

One suspects that Walker is more interested in the horror aspects than character development, because the former reveal real relish and style, while the latter is indicative mostly of boredom. For instance, Sam learns that the only man she trusts, Leonard, has been killed. She doesn't break a sweat, let alone cry. This is either representative of poor writing, poor direction, or just that stiff British upper lip, but the moment doesn't ring true ... especially considering Samantha's hysteria over everything, including spilled nail polish that she mistakes for blood. There isn't enough consistency in the characters, but again, some of these questions may not have lingered had the movie checked out at 90 minutes rather than 110.

If a viewer wants to see comely Lynne Frederick in a shower scene, witness some really eye-popping gore, and enjoy a slow-paced thriller in the *Psycho* tradition, *Schizo* satisfies. If one is looking for something that aims a little higher, moves a little faster, and makes a little more sense, one should pass on this "schizo"-phrenic film.

Squirm (1976) * * ½

Critical Reception

"It sort of goes to pieces ... in its spectacle scenes. The sight of a young man sinking slowly up to his eyeballs in worms looks no more terrifying than a busboy having an accident at Mama Leone's."— Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, July 31, 1976, page 10.

"...Writer Lieberman directs neatly, with enough black humor ... to paper over the cracks of his

preposterous plot ... but the real stars are the worms themselves, whose simple presence ... is charmingly frightening."—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 331.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Dan Scardino (Mick); Patricia Pearcy (Geri); R.A. Dow (Roger); Jean Sullivan (Naomi); Peter MacLean (Sheriff); Fran Higgins (Alma); William Newman (Quigley); Barbara Quinn (Sheriff's Girl); Carl Dagenhart (Willie Grimes); Angel Sande (Millie); Carol Jean Owens (Lizzie); Kim Locouvozzi (Hank); Walter Dimmick (Danny); Leslie Thorsen (Bonnie); Julie Klopp (Mrs. Klopp); Ralph Flanders (First Man at Lunch Counter); Albert Smith (Second Man at Lunch Counter); Jim Shiran (Third Man at lunch Counter); Harold Mamm (Bus Driver); W.A. Lindblatt (Power Line Repairman)

CREW: The Edgar Lansbury/Joseph Beruh Production of *Squirm*. *Music Composed by:* Robert Prince. *Director of Photography:* Joseph Mangine. *Film Editor:* Brian Smedley-Aston. *Executive Producers:* Edgar Lansbury and Joseph Beruh. *Producer:* George Manasse. *Written and Directed by:* Jeff Lieberman. *Art Director:* Henry Shrady. *Production Manager:* Peter Kean. *Casting:* Geri Windsor and Associates. *Make-up Design:* Rick Baker. *Recording Mixer:* Al Gramaglia, Magno Sound. *Sound Editors:* Dan Sable, Harriet Glickstein. *Assistant Director:* Mark Hidenberg. *Script Supervisor:* Judy Rosenthal. *Assistant Cameraman:* Chris Balton. *Assistant Art Director:* Neal DeLuca. *Make-up:* Norman Page. *Costumes:* Diane Finn Chapman. *Assistant Editor:* David Fatt. *Production Coordinator:* Darrel Jonas. *Property Master:* Bruce Steinheimer. *Special Effects:* Bill Milling, Don Farnsworth, Lee Howard. *Unit Manager:* Don Blackburn. *Assistant to Production Manager:* Ed Geil. *Location Manager:* Bill

Chant. *Music Coordinator:* Big Six Music. *Production Associate:* Nan Pearlman. *Lyrics:* Hal Huckaday. *Production Services:* Jay Rich Films, Firelock Films. *Color:* Movielab. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 92 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In September of 1975, a storm ravages Georgia and knocks out all electricity in the small town of Fly Creek. The power lines plunge into wet mud, sending electricity into the ground, adversely affecting worms in the area.

Meanwhile, young Geri is excited because her boyfriend Mick is coming to Fly Creek for a visit. When his bus stops short of Fly Creek because of flooding, Geri borrows a pick-up truck and brings him to town. They stop at a diner for a soda and Mick is disgusted to find a worm flailing about in his cream soda. Later, Fly Creek simpleton Roger is upset with Geri because the truck she borrowed belonged to a worm farm and some 100,000 worms have escaped from the truck in her custody.

The next oddity occurs when Mick and Geri visit Mr. Beardsley, a collector of antiques. Instead of finding him, they spy a skeleton—*picked clean*—in his yard. They return to the site with the police, only to find the corpse gone. The police don't believe their story of a skeleton, so Geri and Mick go fishing with Roger. There, they find he has hidden the skeleton for some dark purpose. Out on the fishing boat, Mick is bitten on the arm by a worm. He goes back to shore to investigate the skeleton while Geri and Roger fish. Roger makes a pass at Geri and she resists, pushing him into the water. Unfortunately, a swarm of worms converge on him in the water, burrowing into his body and face. Meanwhile, Mick confirms that the skeleton is Mr. Beardsley's by matching up the skull with dental records.

Geri and Mick rejoin and try to help Roger, who has disappeared. Mick finds Roger's dad, the worm farmer, with his chest eaten away by worms. He and Geri head back to her house and find a tree mysteriously uprooted. It has shifted in the ground and crashed into Geri's dining room! By the roots, worms are swarming by the millions.

Mick realizes that worms are being driven crazy by electricity carried through the mud. Worse, light is the only thing keeping them at bay, and night is fast approaching! While gathering materials to barricade Geri's house, Mick is confronted by Roger, who has a hundred or so worms dangling from his half-eaten face. Roger knocks Mick out, leaving him alone and vulnerable in the night, and heads for Geri's house. When Mick wakes up, he is surrounded by worms. He makes a torch out of his shirt and escapes. But the worms are now on the rampage in Fly Creek, attacking the police station and the local watering hole, Quigleys! Roger attacks Geri, and Mick returns to help her, finding the house covered in worms. Roger and Mick fight and Roger is thrown to the worms as Mick rescues Geri from the attic. They climb out a window on a tree branch, where they remain all night.

By morning, the worm infestation is over. The power men arrive in Fly Creek to tell the locals everything is "good as new."

COMMENTARY: In deference to its model, the Hitchcock classic *The Birds* (1963), *Squirm* might have been better titled *The Worms*, or perhaps *The Worms Turn*. Like *Frogs* (1972) or *Night of the Lepus* (1972), this is a "revenge of nature" flick in which a group of wronged animals, this time "angry" worms propelled to hostility by a surge of electricity, wreak havoc on the world of man. There is some effective photography and imagery in the film, but this is horror in a minor key because of its jarring shifts in tone. Overall this is a much less thrilling scare ride than *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977)—probably the best of the 1970s animal pack.

There seem to be two mentalities at work in *Squirm*, and that fact makes it less than successful. On one hand, this is sort of like a pre-historic *Dawson's Creek*, involving a small southern town, its local color, and two teens developing a romantic relationship. Truthfully, it plays more like a *Hardy Boys* mystery than a WB drama, but the *Dawson's Creek* reference was too much fun to pass up considering that this movie occurs in "Fly Creek." In the world of *Squirm*, youngsters skirt the police, boyfriends defend girlfriends, and the threat of the day is destroyed by a smart-thinking teen. In some senses, it is the same equation as the 1950s teen horror flicks like *The Blob* (1958). It's good wholesome fun as a mystery is solved,

and authorities (i.e. grown-ups) are humiliated. Horror fluff.

On the other hand, *Squirm* treads some pretty dark territory too. When the lead kids aren't sipping soda at the local ice cream parlor, there's some heavy death and destruction occurring. Thus *Squirm* is a picture that wants to be "dark" at the same time that it offers "innocent" entertainment, and that's a nearly impossible formula. In one delightfully gory moment, worms are unexpectedly found feasting on the torso of Roger's father. In another, Geri's mother is seen dead in a rocking chair, literally eaten alive by hundreds of worms. This is an almost throwaway image in the film, but a powerful one nevertheless. At other times, the villainous Roger appears out of darkness, into the light, and dozens of worms dangle from his face. Also notable are the many close-ups of the worms in action, uncoiling and coiling their pointed little suckers and revealing mouths coated in slime. It's a gross-out movie filled with spectacle, and there is even awe at one point. When worms fill a room in Geri's house, the camera cruises above the teeming mass of life, surveying the mess in an impressive shot. It is disturbing, and wholeheartedly scary.

The problem comes in unifying the gleefully wrought death and disaster with the light-hearted "coming of age" tale. Lots of people die in this movie, including Geri's mother, and the tone vacillates between syrupy teen romance and straight-out horror. Worse, the film indulges in really funny, but dark, humor to bridge the gap. In a truly ridiculous moment, worms are pushed out through a shower-head by the gallon, forming a strange bathroom allusion to *Psycho*'s infamous shower scene. In another darkly humorous moment, Mick and Geri telephone the sheriff to warn him about the worms, as the officer and his girlfriend suck up spaghetti in close-up. This is a wicked and funny visual joke, as the audience fears that these characters will be sucking up the nasty little critters in no time. These moments are actually kind of witty in a B movie manner, but are not capitalized on. While it is rewarding to report that the teenagers are not treated as oversexed horn dogs or fashion show clothes-horses (again, think *Dawson's Creek*), neither are they portrayed as particularly believable people, and Geri's southern accent is pure Hollywood fabrication.

Watching *Squirm*, this reviewer was reminded of *Tremors* (1989), the film that saw a group of individualistic and diverse characters confronting large subterranean critters in the desert. That was a film that perfectly blended humor with horror, and felt genuinely innocent, like *The Blob*, despite the death and destruction involved. Maybe *Tremors* worked (and *Squirm* didn't) purely and simply because of acting chops. Nobody in *Squirm* is incompetent, but nor do the actors manage to make the material come to life with anything approaching the crucial quality of charm. In the hands of a more experienced cast, one can imagine that *Squirm* might be a real roller coaster ride, especially with its effective "animal" effects. Instead it's like the being stuck at the top of the Ferris wheel. The experience is exciting for a while, then nothing happens, and finally, there's just a letdown.

***To the Devil a Daughter* (1976) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Richard Widmark (John Verney); Christopher Lee (Father Michael Rayner); Nastassja Kinski (Catherine); Honor Blackman (Anna); Michael Goodliffe (George De Grass); Anthony Valentine (David); Denholm Elliott (Henry Beddows); Eva Marie Meineke (Eveline de Grass); Derek Francis (Bishop); Constantine Degoguel (Kollde); Isabella Telezynska (Margaret); Petra Peters (Sister Helle); Anna Bentincki (Isabel); Irene Prador (German Matron); Brian Wilde (Black Room Attendant); William Ridoutt (Airport Porter); Howard Goorney (Critic); Zoe Hendry (First Girl); Lindy Benson (Second Girl); Jo Peters (Third Girl); Bobby Sparrow (Fourth Girl).

CREW: A Hammer/Terra Anglo/German Co-Production, *To the Devil a Daughter*. *Screenplay:* Chris Wicking. *Adaptation:* John Peacock. *From the Novel by:* Dennis Wheatley. *Produced by:* Roy Skeggs. *Directed by:* Peter Sykes. *Director of Photography:* David Watkin. *Production Manager:*

Ron Jackson. *Film Editor*: John Trumper. *Art Director*: Don Picton. *Special Effects*: Les Bowie. *Assistant Director*: Barry Langley. *Casting*: Irene Lamb. *Sound Recordist*: Dennis Whitlock. *Sound Editor*: Mike LeMare. *Camera Operator*: Ron Robson. *Continuity*: Sally Jones. *Make-up*: Eric Allwright. *Make-up*: George Blackler. *Wardrobe Supervisor*: Laura Nightingale. *Hairdressing Supervisor*: Jeanette Freeman. *Construction Manager*: Wag Hammerton. *Recording Director*: Tony Lumkin. *Dubbing Mixer*: Bill Rowe. *Gaffer*: Ted Hallows. *Publicist*: Mike Russell. *Processed by*: RCA. *Music Composed by*: Paul Glass. *Musical Supervision*: Philip Martell. A Co-production by Hammer Film Productions Ltd., London, and Terra Filmkunst GMBH Berlin. Made at EMI Elstree Studios Hertfordshire, England, and on location in the Federal Republic of Germany. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Upon leaving Bavaria and the convent where she was raised, the beautiful but naive Sister Catherine is met in London by popular occult author John Verney. At the request of Catherine's father, a drunk, Verney takes Catherine to his apartment and shields her there from a group of Satanists led by an excommunicated priest named Father Michael.

At the same time, the Satanists tend to a woman named Margaret who is believed to be pregnant with a demon. As Margaret goes into labor far away, Catherine writhes in Verney's apartment with sympathetic pain. The baby eventually claws its way out of Margaret's womb, leaving her to die a bloody mess.

Verney realizes that Catherine, though innocent, is involved in something terrible. He fears Father Michael and the dark church are using her in some ritual that celebrates the advent of All Hallow's Eve. Her role is so awful, in fact, that her father recanted his belief in Satanism when he learned of it, and begged Verney for help.

Father Michael uses his considerable satanic powers to terrorize Henry, Catherine's father, and learn her location. He transforms Henry's phone into a snake and eventually kills the poor man, but

not before he reveals Catherine's sanctuary with Verney. The Satanists then conduct a ritual to bring Catherine to them. Verney sees Catherine leaving his apartment and pursues her. He catches her and finds she is wearing a satanic crucifix. Catherine then confesses she has been raised to believe that the demon Astaroth is God, the Lord! She remembers a ritual, an orgy in fact, in which she was chosen to be his.

Verney researches Father Michael Rayner's history. He was excommunicated twenty years earlier for refusing to recant his heretical belief in chaos and man rather than God. Michael Rayner wanted to create an "avatar," a personification of God on earth. Wanting to know more, Verney reads the secret Grimoire of Astaroth.

Meanwhile, Catherine is beckoned again by Father Michael, and this time she commits murder (at his bidding) to escape Verney's apartment. Verney must save Catherine, aware that Rayner plans to baptize her in Astaroth's blood so she will become an avatar. The ritual is to occur at a mausoleum, but Rayner is playing with dangerous forces. The demonic baby is Astaroth, and Rayner wants to kill it and transfer its essence to Catherine's human form. Verney arrives just in time to save Catherine and help Astaroth make Rayner a victim of his own plan.

COMMENTARY: A British response to *The Exorcist* (1973), *To the Devil a Daughter* is one of the most boring horror movies imaginable, shot without an ounce of flair, style, or energy. It merits a "two star" review out of courtesy, considering the fine cast involved, including Christopher Lee, Honor Blackman, Denholm Elliott, Nastassia Kinski, and Richard Widmark.

Something has gone terribly wrong in what should have been an interesting narrative. At face value, this is the story of a writer who becomes enmeshed in a Satanic plot to bring a demonic form to Earth. The form for that "demon" will be an innocent human girl who has grown up believing that Satanism is "good" and normal. Now, that brief summary sounds like a pretty interesting one, and many fine (and not so fine) horror productions have used the idea of an "investigator" (whether a writer or a private eye) as a starting point for a terrifying tale. *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (1974–74) used

that format every week, and *Angel Heart* (1987) and *Lord of Illusions* (1995) both gave it a shot on the silver screen. Any one of those productions is much better than this film, which is so muddled that it is never clear who is doing what to whom, why it is being done, and how it is happening.

If one senses hostility from this reviewer over *To the Devil a Daughter*, it is only because the film purposely leaves viewers out of the loop. At the climax of the film, the protagonist and villain have access to a book, the Grimoire of Astaroth, which the audience doesn't get to read. Suddenly, these dueling arch-nemeses begin talking about things the audience has no clue about, and indeed, the plot resolves on a heretofore unknown bit of critical information. Verney picks up a rock stained with the blood of Astaroth, made of flint, and strikes Lee down with it, killing him. How did he know to do that? Why is it so easy to kill the villain? *This* is a denouement? Instead of laying the groundwork for it, or any exposition whatsoever, the film trudges along without a word of explanation. This is especially troubling since Lee's character, Rayner, is seen to have terrible powers. He hypnotizes Kinski from a distance, and turns a telephone into snakes. But he couldn't dodge a magic rock? An audience has to be primed for this kind of solution to a complex problem, and no foundation is given in the film.

The mechanics of Rayner's evil plan are none too clear either. We assume Christopher Lee's character killed the living Astaroth so that a god avatar could be created inside Catherine in human form ... but jeez ... has anyone involved with this movie ever heard of narrative clarity? This is a film filled with a bunch of scenes, one after the other, that don't connect, and don't register any impact. Every aspect of the film, from performance to direction, seems to be filmed in a molasses-slow haze.

To the Devil a Daughter is one of the most under-whelming "devil" movies made in the seventies and certainly a low-point for Hammer Studios. Richard Widmark, a fine actor, is gravely miscast as the intrepid hero, and never registers much life, let alone personality. The movie wastes time on peripheral characters (such as Honor Blackman's) who amount to nothing, and there are virtually no special effects or fireworks to keep the story afloat, even though the

legendary Les Bowie is involved. Though there is frontal nudity of the lovely Kinski, one has to get through an hour and half of boring dialogue, confusing narrative, and an insipid, inexplicable climax to get to it.

This author purchased the VHS tape of *To the Devil a Daughter* from Half.com for purposes of review, and when he put it in his VCR, he noticed the film had not been rewound to the beginning, but was left at precisely the point of Kinski's nude scene. The fact that the previous owner of the tape kept the film at that particular point in the production speaks more cogently about the movie's failings than any written review ever could, so let's leave it there.

***The Town That Dreaded Sundown* (1976) * * ½**

Cast and Crew

CAST: Ben Johnson (Captain J.D. Morales); Andrew Prine (Deputy Norman Ramsey); Jimmy Clem (Sgt. Mal Griffin); Jim City (Police Chief R.J. Sullivan); Charles B. Pierce (Patrolman A.C. Benson); Robert Aquino (Sheriff Otis Barker); Cindy Butler (Peggy Loomis); Christine Ellsworth (Linda Mae Jenkins); Dawn Wells (Helen Reed); Earl E. Smith (Dr. Kress); Steve Lyons (Roy Allen); Joe Catanatto (Eddie LeDeux); Roy Lee Brown (Rainbow Johnson); Mike Hackworth (Sammy Fuller); Misty West (Emma Lou Cook); Rick Hildreth (Buddy Turner); Jason Darnell (Captain Gus Wells); Mike Downs (Newspaper Reporter); Bill Dietz (Newspaper Reporter); Carolyn Moreland (Newspaper Reporter); Michael Brown (Police Officer); Woody Woodman (F.B.I. Agent); James D. McAdams (Sheriff's Deputy); John Stroud (Dr. Preston Hickson); Mason Andres (Reverend Harden); Richard Green (H.S. Principal); Dorothy Darlene Orr (Dispatcher); Don Adkins (Suspect); Bud Davis (the Phantom Killer).

CREW: Samuel Z. Arkoff Presents A Charles B. Pierce Film, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*.

Music: Jaime Mendosa-Nava. *Screenplay:* Carl E. Smith. *Produced and Directed by:* Charles B. Pierce. *Narrated by:* Vern Stierman. *Cinematography:* Jim Roberson. *Film Editor:* Tom Boutross. *Associate Producer:* Tom Moore. *Production Manager:* Bob Gates. *Art Director:* Myrl Teeter. *Script Supervisor:* Barbary Pryor. *Wardrobe:* Bonnie Langriff. *Assistant Wardrobe:* Chris Ellsworth. *Property Master:* Libby Smith. *Assistant Props:* Denise Brouillette. *Special Effects:* Joe Catalanatto. *First Assistant Camera:* Steve Lyons. *Second Assistant Camera:* Michael Shertey. *Camera Boom Operator:* Cheyenne Rivera. *Production Mixer:* Dick Damon. *Stunt Coordinator:* Bud Davis. *Make-up:* Cheri Johnston. *Production Assistant:* Ginger Tanton, Lynn Andres. *Sound Effects:* Dimitry Gortinsky, Dan Finitity, Steve Shearsby, Fred Judkins, Phil Haverman, Andrew Herbert. *Titles and Opticals:* Pacific Title. *Re-recording:* Goldwyn Studios. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Color:* Technicolor. From Charles B. Pierce Productions, Inc. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Things are going quite well for the town of Texarkana after World War II. Then, on Sunday, March 3, 1946, terror strikes unexpectedly. A masked psychopath attacks two local teens while they are “parking” at an out-of-the-way stretch of the woods. Worried that this crime may be indicative of a pattern, local police warn college students to stay away from lonely roads after nightfall.

Then, on March 24, the second attack from the masked assailant comes suddenly. This time, a worried police deputy, Ramsey, hears shots fired in the woods, and discovers a couple murdered in the brush.

The Phantom Killer becomes national news as the town of Texarkana sells out of guns and the local residents cower behind locked doors after sundown. The police send for help and happily receive Captain J.D. Morales, the legendary Texas Ranger known as the Lone Wolf. Morales hits the scene and asks for the full

cooperation of the local police. He gets it, and Ramsey and Morales team up to catch the menace. Their first ploy is to dress cops as “female” decoys to make them attractive targets. This gambit fails.

Then at the senior prom on April 14, the killer attacks again, just after midnight. The masked madman is more audacious in his approach this time, throwing a young man out of a moving car and then stalking the boy’s girlfriend. He ties her to a tree and kills her.

At a loss for clues, Morales seeks the help of a prominent psychiatrist, Dr. Kress. Kress establishes that the phantom is a sexual sadist and “insane.” Later, Ramsey and Morales catch an armed robber who claims he is the phantom, but it is just a ruse to get publicity. Then, on May 3rd, the killer comes out to hunt again. This time, he follows beautiful Helen Reed home from her trip to the grocery store. Using a silenced, the phantom kills Helen’s husband and breaks into her house. As she is telephoning the police, the killer shoots her in the face. Miraculously, she survives this assault and flees the house. The Phantom Killer, armed with an axe, pursues. Helen gets to safety at a neighbor’s house, and the killer is, for once, foiled.

As the trail of the Phantom Killer grows cold, Morales and Ramsey get a lucky break. They track down his car and find him in an area of hills and trees. They chase him down, but he runs in front of a train and escapes to the other side of the tracks. Frustrated, Morales manages to shoot the killer in the leg. Unfortunately, this flesh wound is not enough to fell the murderer. The Phantom Killer escapes into the swamp land, never to be heard from again...

COMMENTARY: Here’s another thriller (from the folks who brought the world *Legend of Boggy Creek* [1973]) that seems bipolar. Much of the film is a straight-faced accounting of a serial killer’s brutal spree in Texarkana in the spring of 1946, and prone to scenes of graphic violence. Yet this hard material is blended, unceremoniously, with *Smokey and the Bandit*-style car-chases and imbecilic “cop” humor. The two genres mix uneasily, resulting in a strange, bewildering motion picture punctuated by moments of extremely adept horror.

Produced on a low budget in Arkansas, *The Town That Dreaded*

Sundown at least appears authentic to the period it depicts, a not inconsiderable accomplishment in mind of financial restrictions. It is certainly a more confident (and competent) film than *Boggy Creek*. The killer it studies is also an effective figure of terror: an anonymous mad-dog with creepy eyes, a slow, purposeful gait, and a tendency to pop up when least expected. Perhaps the best-handled scene in the picture comes when this psychopath attacks the home of Dawn Wells (Mary Ann of *Gilligan's Island*!). The murderer shoots her husband in the head, and then fires a bullet right through Wells' cheek. This is a bloody, harrowing sequence that approaches its violence with blunt style and head-on, gritty camera-work. As the killer goes after the injured, traumatized Wells with an axe, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* picks up enough momentum to generate considerable suspense. A bloodied Wells runs through a corn-field at night, and crawls on hands and knees to a neighbor's house, the audience fearing all along she won't make it.

A woman being chased by a monster (either supernatural or psychological) is one of the horror genre's most oft-mined images, yet this scene works in *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* because of the semi-documentary approach and utter randomness of the crime. As the narrator, like some omniscient Joe Friday, sets up the details of the sequence in emotionless tenor, the audience is reminded that this event is based on a true crime. After that chilling reminder, the picture does not shy away from facing its violence head on. An overdose of film style here would have killed the documentary feel of the proceedings, and the horror works because the audience identifies with the traumatic situation. This is a normal, middle-class woman suddenly thrust (undeservedly) into a frightening, life-threatening situation. Normality gives way to terror without reason or warning. Since the audience is primed, aware that this really happened, it sympathizes with Wells (a minor character in the film), and is led to think "*there but for the grace of God go I.*"

Horror films work like well-oiled machines when they get their audiences to put themselves up there on the screen with the protagonists, and in at least this one scene, *Sundown* accomplishes that feat. Considering the silly "scare" scenes of *Boggy Creek*, this is a great feat.

Alas, the remainder of the film is not nearly so skilled. It strains for comedic effect with the inclusion of a terrible character named “Spark Plug,” a hapless Texarkana policeman who cannot drive worth a damn and who, while dressed in drag to catch the killer, even gets fondled. Unfortunately, Spark Plug comes with his own inane theme music, which indicates that his behavior is meant to be funny. Ah, there’s nothing like some good old-fashioned redneck humor to sink a horror film...

The Town That Dreaded Sundown also pauses unnecessarily for the extended car chase of a random robber, believed by authorities to be a suspect in the murders. This set piece also ends in unnecessary comedy when good old Spark Plug pilots his car into a pond.

In addition to these overt lapses in tone, the deep-voiced narrator tends to reveal too much on occasion, literally explaining the plot—as though scene transitions are beyond the movie’s limited grasp. Unintentional humor creeps in too, especially in the casting department. All of the “young” folks at the high school prom appear to be thirty or forty years old.

Yet in its depiction of a town where “fear spreads like cancer,” *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* is chilling at times. The killer’s identity is never learned, and that conclusion makes for an unsettling, provocative finale. Could the killer be in attendance at the showing of this very film in 1977? In asking that question (and dramatizing that very thing), *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* becomes self-reflexive, including itself as part of the overall tapestry of the murderer’s history. It may be for that very reason that Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson referenced the film in *Scream* (1996). Like the psycho in that flick, the murderer of Texarkana is often seen only by his shoes—a visual manner of cloaking identity. And, again as in *Scream*, this nutcase is believed to be an intelligent, respected member of the community, one of Texarkana’s “own.”

Had the cop shtick been less overt, and the film’s overall tone more in keeping with the Dawn Wells sequence (and less like a Hal Needham buddy flick), *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* might today be acknowledged as a classic of regional, cheap genre filmmaking.

At least one sequence still causes shivers today. Ben Johnson's Captain Morales sits in a restaurant with a psychologist discussing the serial killer case. As the doctor describes the killer as a sadist driven by a strong sex drive, the camera moves purposefully, but enigmatically to another table. There, underneath the tablecloth, the audience recognizes the killer's familiar shoes and legs. Thus *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* remembers that even in small town America, evil is close by ... and listening.

***Track of the Moonbeast* (1976) ½ ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Chase Cordell (Paul G. Carlson); Donna Leigh-Drake (Kathy); Gregorio Sala (Johnny Longbow); Patrick Wright, Francise Kessler, Crawford May Callum, Alan Swain, Fred McCaffrey, Timothy Wayne Brown, Jeanne Swain, Tim Butler.

CREW: Cinemashares International Presents *Track of the Moonbeast*. *Director of Photography:* F. Scott Woods. *Assistant Camera Operator:* David M. Conley. *Recordist:* Kay St. Clair. *Production Manager:* Bob Orrin. *Script Supervisor:* Maggie James. *Special Make-up and Monster Created by:* Joe Blasco. *Music and Sound Effects:* Harry D. Glass. *Color by:* Movielab. *Opticals:* Exceptional Opticals Inc. *Written by:* William Finger and Charles Sinclair. "*California Lady*" *written and sung by:* Frank Larabee. *Executive Producer:* Frank J. Desiderio. *Produced by:* Ralph T. Desiderio. *Directed by:* Dick Ashe. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running time:* 90 min. (approx.)

SYNOPSIS: Working in the New Mexico desert, a young anthropologist, Paul Carson, digs for fossils until an Indian friend and professor, Johnny Longbow, appears and startles him with a practical joke. With Johnny are two young graduate students and a beautiful blonde photographer named Kathy. Paul strikes up a friendship with Kathy, who is seeking night shots of the desert. While Paul and Kathy grow close, Johnny tells his graduate students

the legend of a lizard man who once walked the Earth, long before man ruled the planet.

On a mountaintop that night, Kathy and Paul watch the stars. A meteor shower lights the sky and one lunar rock strikes Paul, grazing his forehead. Paul appears uninjured, but he locates the offending moon-rock, and takes it back to his apartment. Before long, Paul is terribly sick. Worse, as he sleeps, some kind of terrible lizard monster kills some locals. At the scene of one murder, Johnny Longbow analyzes an odd footprint. Could the murderer be a distant relative of the tyrannosaurus rex, a lizard that walks upright? The police enlist Longbow's help to catch the monster.

The following evening, a gray lizard man kills two campers in their tent, and Johnny comes to realize that Paul has been affected by his collision with the moon rock. Longbow and Kathy take Paul to the hospital and x-rays confirm that a piece of moon-rock is lodged in his skull. Meanwhile, Johnny remembers the Native American legend about the lizard man: he was killed from within by fire. Suspecting Paul's unusual transformation into beast, Longbow and the police confront the ugly truth that he may be killing people by night. A horrified Paul is locked up in the hospital, and the police and Johnny watch in horror as he transforms into a giant lizard before their eyes.

Two specialists are flown in from NASA to help Paul, but x-rays now reveal more lunar particles growing in his brain and spreading through his whole system. Longbow fears the alien material will eventually cause Paul to spontaneously combust, just like the lizard man of myth. Fearing his imminent death, Paul escapes from the hospital with Kathy's help. He steals a motorcycle and flees to his favorite mountains so he can die a man instead of a beast. But night is falling, and Paul soon becomes a monster again. With Kathy in danger and two police officers dead from a vicious lizard man attack, Johnny Longbow realizes he has only one option. He has fashioned an arrowhead out of lunar rock, and uses a bow and arrow to shoot the weapon into the lizard man's stomach. Causing an energy overload, the arrowhead kills the beast. Struck down, the lizard man—Paul—vanishes in a red glow.

COMMENTARY: *Track of the Moonbeast* is a fine example of aged

'70s cheese, which is why, no doubt, the folks at *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1989–1999) “honored” it on their mercilessly quick-witted series. Is *Track of the Moonbeast* really *that* bad? The answer, in a nutshell, is yes. It is a failure in every way, from acting and special effects to story, yet its low-budget incompetence still has a quirky charm. It makes one long for the bygone 1970s, and gloriously bad productions like *Bog* (1978), *The Crater Lake Monster* (1977) and *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975).

Sometimes a review can't do a film justice. This is one of those times, but let's give it a go. *Track of the Moonbeast* opens with a clumsy zoom as a meteor is seen from an observatory. As it whirls by on a visible wire, the meteor resembles a flaming charcoal briquette plucked from a backyard hibachi. Delightfully, this very meteor makes it through the atmosphere and strikes the film's hero, Paul, smack-dab in the head. A piece of the meteor lodges in his skull and subsequently turns him into a lizard-man. This is too silly for words. A red-hot meteor falls to earth at incredible velocity (essentially a burning bullet...) and lodges in a human skull, but doesn't kill the guy on impact? Talk about your close encounters! That Paul survives the brush with this cosmic spitball is dumb enough, but that the encounter turns him into an upright dinosaur man is even more laughable. There is something cheerful and utterly wonderful about this film's innocent stupidity.

As if a problem with believability isn't enough to sideline *Track of the Moonbeast*, the film takes time out from its not-so-compelling story line to feature a folk music interlude. Here, the immortal tune “California Lady” is performed on-stage. This is a particularly useless sequence of the film, a transparent ploy to feature “the talents” of someone who was probably a friend of the producer. Had the film managed to generate any momentum, this would have stopped the movie cold. Since the movie has no such momentum, the scene is merely a bewildering irritation.

Again, this decision to include a show-stopping “production number” in the midst of a horror movie brings back terrific memories of dreadful movies of yesteryear, such as *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies*.

The actors attempting to breathe life into this material are pretty

hopeless too. They are all attractive, but none of them have the slightest notion how to develop a performance, let alone foster audience identification. In the best tradition of bad B movies, the hero (Chase Cordell) walks around for much of the film without a shirt on, and the heroine (Donna Leigh Drake) wears tight, skimpy seventies fashions. It's an old rule of showmanship: keep the assets up front. Sex appeal can trump talent, if necessary, and has done so in many a horror film.

Track of the Moonbeast plays out like a catalogue of 1970s film techniques. There is the musical montage, the reliance on zooms, the over-dependence on P.O.V. "killing" scenes, and even the old time-lapse photography transformation scene (last seen in *Sssssss* [1973]). These over-utilized techniques all feel like welcome friends. Anybody who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s remembers the strangely sensual pain of sitting down in front of a TV on a Saturday afternoon and watching a dozen films just like *Track of the Moonbeast*. The badness of it is glorious. It is a thoroughly undistinguished, barely professional film and if truth be told, a nostalgia trip. Once upon a time, bad movies didn't cost hundreds of millions of dollars and star the faces of the WB. Once upon a time, the same level of stupidity could be forged on a minuscule budget, with barely credible actors.

Those were the days...

1977

Alice, Sweet Alice (1977) * * 1/2

Critical Reception

“...a very loud, crude slash-and-stab horror thriller. Gross and unpleasant.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 3.

“...a complex indictment of Catholicism ... recalls the better work of George Romero.”—Mike Mayo, *Videohound's Horror Show*, 1998, page 7.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Linda Miller (Catherine Spages); Mildred Clinton (Mrs. Tredoni); Paula Sheppard (Alice Spages); Miles McAlister (Dom Spages); Jane Lowry (Annie); Rudolph Willrich (Father Tom); Michael Handstark (Detective Spino); Alphone DeNoble (Mr. Alphonso); Gary Allen (Doctor); Brooke Shields (Karen Spages); Louise Horton (Dr. Whitman); Tom Signorelli (Detective Brennon); Antonio Rocca (Funeral Director); Lillian Roth (the Pathologist); Kathy Rich (Angela); Ted Tinling (Detective); Mary Boylan (Mother Superior); Peter Bosche (Monsignor); Joseph Rossi (Father Joe); Dick Bocelli (Hotel Clerk); Lucy Hale (Church Soloist); Mario Quazzo (Robert); Sally Anne Golden (Police Woman); Drew Roman (Policeman).

CREW: Richard K. Rosenberg and Alfred Sole Present *Alice, Sweet Alice*. *Production Designer:* John Lawless. *Costume Designer:* Michelle Cohen. *Music:* Stephen Lawrence. *Film Editor:* Edward Salier. *Screenplay:* Rosemary Ritvo and Alfred Sole. *Producer:* Richard K. Rosenberg. *Directed by:* Alfred

Sole. Cameraman: Chuck Hall. *Production Manager:* Rosemary Ritvo. *Make-up:* Anne Paul, Karen Soule. *Wardrobe:* Lenora Guarini. *Assistant to Producer:* Robert Burk, Jr. *Script:* Elizabeth Weiznegger. *Assistant Director:* Adrienne Hamalian. *Boom:* Lawrence Scharf. *Sound:* Michael Salwasser. *Set Director:* Stephen Finkin. *Assistant Cameraman:* Chris Hayes. *Special Effects:* Illusion Inc. *Opticals:* EFX Unlimited. *Color by:* Fuji Film. Filmed in Paterson, New Jersey. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 100 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Two sisters, Karen and Alice, vie for supremacy in their fractured family unit. Their father, Dom, has left their mother, Catherine, to marry a woman named Julia. The local priest, Father Tom, shows a distinct preference for the angelic Karen. On one visit to the rectory, Father Tom gives Karen a beautiful gift: an antique crucifix. This token of affection upsets the rectory housekeeper, the strange old lady, Mrs. Tredoni.

On one Sunday, something goes terribly wrong at Church. Someone dressed in a yellow slicker and fright mask strangles little Karen and sets her corpse on fire. Police investigate the crime, and Alice's shrewish aunt Annie suspects Alice is the culprit because the jealous little girl was the last one in the church before the incident, and she also had Karen's special veil in her possession. Annie implicates Alice to the police, who take Alice's school records and learn that her principal has recommended the girl see a psychologist for anger issues.

Meanwhile, Mr. Alphonso, the obese building landlord, warns Alice that he also knows what she has done because he has found her little playroom in the basement. There, Alice keeps a yellow slicker and a fright mask identical to those of the killer.

The psychotic killer strikes again, stabbing nosy Aunt Annie in the leg repeatedly during a surprise assault on a staircase. While Annie is rushed to the hospital, Dom searches for Alice in the apartment basement and finds the incriminating evidence. He still refuses to believe that his daughter could be a murderer. The police, however, place credence in the testimony of Annie and Alphonso, and take

Alice into custody. Alice fails a polygraph test, and is placed in the care of a psychologist.

Refusing still to believe his daughter's culpability, Dom "plays" detective and is lured to an out-of-the-way warehouse by the killer. There, he is murdered in ruthless fashion: first stabbed in the shoulder, then beaten mercilessly in the face and mouth with a brick, and finally shoved out of a high window. Since Alice was under supervision during this terrible crime, her innocence is established, and she is released to Catherine's care.

Then, at a church service, the killer strikes one more time: killing Father Tom during communion. To the surprise of all involved, the perpetrator is crazy old Mrs. Tredoni, who was driven over the edge of sanity by the death of her own daughter some years earlier. She believes this death was in payment for her sins, and so killed Karen for the sins of her parents, Dom and Catherine. Karen, it seems, was born out of wedlock.

After the violent deaths of the Father Tom and Mrs. Tredoni near the church altar, an unseen Alice steals the bloody murder weapon, and slips it surreptitiously into a bag of her other "souvenirs"...

COMMENTARY: *Alice, Sweet Alice* is actually more sour than sweet. It's another psychological thriller (in the mode of other mid-'70s stab-and-slash films such as *Black Christmas* [1974] and *Schizo* [1976]), wherein the main game is to misdirect viewers. Here, all the clues point to the fact that little Alice, a "bad seed," is a psychotic killer when in fact there is a so-called "surprise ending" revealing a different perpetrator. Like *Schizo*, *Alice, Sweet Alice* distinguishes itself mostly in the sheer breadth and graphic nature of its bloody violence. There are some sudden and surprising attacks, as well as the obligatory "revelations" sequence at the end, but today the film looks hackneyed despite the moments of horror which come without warning and are striking in their impact.

Alice, Sweet Alice is a film about "sin" and "sinners," so religious (Catholic) imagery infuses the movie throughout. The picture begins with whispered, rushed prayer that is so garbled as to be both unintelligible and creepy. Later, there are several shots of religious icons, crosscut with the "assailant" murdering Karen and

setting her corpse aflame. These moments all represent non-traditional clues (aural and visual) as to the identity of the killer, even though the script goes in an opposite direction: always pointing towards Alice as the vicious attacker.

Clearly, Alice is a good candidate because she keeps a strange “hobby room” in her apartment basement, one with photographs of her dad, burning candles, creepy multi-faced dolls, and even a jar of cockroaches. Testimony from so-called experts also points toward Alice, in particular from the school principal who has requested that the girl see a psychologist. The physical “size” similarities between Alice and the diminutive Mrs. Tredoni also “cloak” the identity of the killer, who wears a slicker (why always a slicker?) and a mask.

But *Alice, Sweet Alice* moves in a different direction too. Though the crimes are bloody and violent, the victims are all depicted as “bad” or disgusting people. Mr. Alphonso is the repulsive, hugely obese landlord of Alice’s apartment building, and is shown to be eating in bed in a room that, according to Alice, “smells like cat piss.” Still, Alice plays a weird game with him, coming off as a seductress when she gives him some “funeral cake,” and suggestively licks her finger. The inference is obvious: Alphonso is a fat, disgusting, perverted slob who deserves to die. He might even be a child molester...

Similarly, the nosy Aunt Annie pays for her busybody nature by suffering a gruesome attack on a stairwell. In a sense then, *Alice, Sweet Alice* forecasts the plot of *Seven* (1995), in which “sinners” were singled out and murdered for their character flaws. Of course, *Alice, Sweet Alice* isn’t nearly as good as *Seven*. The gulf in quality between these two films rests in questions of character. Tredoni is fine as the killer, a vengeful Catholic with a grudge against the Church, but why is Alice such a creepy little kid? Has Catholicism warped her too? Has the priest’s obvious favoritism of Karen turned her into a monster? Why does she keep the killer’s slicker and mask in her basement room? How did she get her hands on these accouterments? Do Tredoni and Alice have a “time-share” arrangement on the basement? Why does Alice lie about getting her period? Why does she come onto Mr. Alphonso? If the film addressed some of these questions, it might have more powerfully and cogently made a point about the impact of religion in general,

and Catholicism specifically, on children.

But no sufficient answers are ever forthcoming on any of these fronts. Alice's psychologist says she has a schizoid personality, and the film's conclusion (in which Alice grabs the killer's weapon and secrets it in a bag...) brings up an interesting point. No, Alice is not the killer, but she might as well be, because she is clearly demented ... and maybe a conspirator. Thus *Alice*, *Sweet Alice* depicts two villains, a murderous older woman, and the younger, deviant Alice. So the "misdirection" isn't really a trick at all, or is it? Instead, Alice could be the killer of at least some of the victims, and that means that, essentially, the film's plot has been constructed so that at least two answers make sense and fit the clues. That's a cheat, making the revelation at the end feel random.

Despite the narrative confusion, *Alice*, *Sweet Alice* boasts some very powerful imagery, and its scenes of intense violence are not only stark and shocking, but seem to plug into a demented psyche. There's insane ferocity in the murder scenes, and these graphic interludes are much more powerful than anything else in the movie ... as though the director has tapped into some psychotic energy or sensibility. The first view of the psycho killer, masked in that yellow hood, is a complete surprise, and wholly startling. Later, the attack on Anne in the staircase is a blood bath orchestrated with a butcher knife, and one is tempted to turn away because the blood effects, the cutting, and the performances are remarkable.

Dom's death is also an opportunity for craziness visualized. The murderer strikes Dom in the face with a brick, and then shoves him out a high window ... after smashing in his bloodied teeth. Some social critics might rightly ask how it is possible to praise this kind of utter, explicit violence, but they would be missing the point. So often in Hollywood films, the violence is candy-coated and easy. Consider *Con Air* (1997), or *Rambo* (1985). People died in those films in often graphic, violent ways, but the acts were done in such a casual manner that audiences barely sighed. In *Alice*, *Sweet Alice*, the violence is shocking, disturbing and so tangible as to be cringe-worthy. Frankly, that's what horror *should* be about. If people are going to die on film, the audience should feel the terror, the revulsion, and the "insanity." Otherwise, what is death but an

exclamation point to a car chase, an action scene or a fistfight? It is not horror films that numb audiences to violence, it is the Hollywood flick that finds no terror, nothing extraordinary, in murder and mayhem.

Alice, Sweet Alice is usually a footnote in horror texts, if it is mentioned at all, remarking that it was Brooke Shields' debut film. An additional footnote might remind interested viewers that the film, for all of its ham-handed attempts at misdirection, has moments of pure terror and graphic violence in it.

***Audrey Rose* (1977) * * ***

Critical Reception

"The very lack of sentimentalism, the stress on normalcy in backgrounds and people, is what makes *Audrey Rose* so effective.... There are major thrill sequences in *Audrey Rose*, to be sure, but the biggest single jolt comes from the upsetting of a teacup during a conversation. So cunningly has Wise directed the scene that ... the clatter of the teacup is far more upsetting than any shock cut to a scene of physically repellent content ... a film made with such taste and pride in craftsmanship...."—William K. Everson, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVIII, Number 6, June-July 1977, page 373.

"...over-long, sometimes over-emphatic, and it has a staggeringly misjudged ending. But it's also notable for centering on the spiritual plight of the paranormal malarkey."—Tony Rayns, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 45.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Marsha Mason (Janice Templeton); Anthony Hopkins (Elliott Hoover); John Beck (Bill Templeton); Susan Swift (Ivy Templeton); Norman

Lloyd (Dr. Steven Lipscomb); John Hillerman (Scott Velie); Robert Walden (Brice Mack); Phillip Sterling (Judge Longley); Ivy Jones (Mary Lou Sides); Stephen Pearlman (Russ Rothman); Aly Wassil (Maharishi Gupta Prodesch); Mary Jackson (Mother Veronica); Richard Lawson (Policeman #1); Tony Brande (Detective Fallon); Elizabeth Farley (Carole Rothman); Ruth Manning (Customer in Store); David Wilson (Policeman #2); David Fresco (Dominick); Pat Corley (Dr. Webster); Eunice Christopher (Mrs. Corbone); Karen Anders (Marie [waitress]).

CREW: A United Artists Release. *Production Design:* Harry Horner. *Set Decorator:* Jerry Wunderlich. *Costumes:* Dorothy Jeakins. *Film Editor:* Carl Kress. *Production Manager:* Charles H. Maguire. *Casting:* Lynn Stalmaster. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Michael Small. *Director of Photography:* Victor J. Kemper. *Screenplay by:* Frank DeFelitta (*Based on His Novel*). *Produced by:* Joe Wizan and Frank DeFelitta. *Directed by:* Robert Wise. *Production Illustrator:* Maurice Zuberano. *Special Effects:* Henry Miller, Jr. *Production Services:* Rock Company/Persky-Bright. *Sound:* Tom Overton, William McCaughey, Aaron Rochin, Michael J. Kohut. *First Assistant Director:* Art Levinson. *Second Assistant Director:* Leslie Moulton. *Camera Operator:* Bob Thomas. *Script Supervisor:* Marie Kenney. *Assistant Art Director:* George Szeptycki. *Make-up:* Frank Griffin. *Hairdresser:* Jean Austin. *Costumers:* Shirlee Strahm, Sheldon Levine. *Property Master:* Marty Wunderlich. *Orchestrations:* Jack Hayes. *Music Editor:* Milton Lustig. *Construction Coordinator:* Bob Krame. *Consultation on Hypnosis:* Jean Holroyd, Ph.D. *Court Technical Advisor:* Daniel A. Lipsig. *Assistant to Producer:* Betty Gumm. *Production Coordinator:* Rosayln Catania. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Lab Processing:* MGM. *Release Print:* Deluxe General. *Titles and Optical:* MGM. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG.

Running Time: 113 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On a rainy day in 1965, five-year-old Audrey Rose Hoover plays merrily in the back seat of the family car as her mother drives a treacherous highway. A black car suddenly careens into view and smashes into the Hoover family automobile head-on. The Hoover car tumbles down a hill and catches fire. Trapped inside the burning vehicle, Audrey Rose cries for help for several minutes before she dies, consumed by fire.

Years later, in 1976, the Templeton family lives a life of affluent happiness in New York City. Mr. Templeton is a harried businessman, his wife a photographer and their eleven-year-old daughter, Ivy, a well-adjusted child who suffers from the occasional nightmares or episodes of sleepwalking. On one excursion to Central Park, a bearded stranger watches the Templetons. He follows them about the grounds and even shows up, days later, at Ivy's school. When Ivy is sick one day, the stranger calls the Templeton home to inquire about the girl's condition. Mr. and Mrs. Templeton fear they have a stalker on their hands, and Mr. Templeton goes to the police. The authorities tell him they can do nothing until the stranger makes a move.

One day, Mrs. Templeton is waylaid by a fender-bender and arrives at Ivy's school twenty minutes late to pick her up. To Mrs. Templeton's horror, Ivy is gone—vanished. Then the stranger shows up and informs her that Ivy is safe and sound, at home, and that he escorted her there.

Soon the stranger has a name: Elliott Hoover. He invites the Templetons out to dinner to tell them his strange story. It was his wife and daughter, Audrey Rose, who perished in that car accident eleven years earlier. Elliott was shattered by the death of his family, but two psychics promptly informed him that his daughter was alive and living in an apartment in New York City. Hoover was understandably reluctant to believe such a tale, but he re-examined his spiritual beliefs on a pilgrimage to India and came to believe in the philosophy of reincarnation. Since then, he has been searching for the soul of his daughter, and believes he has found it in Ivy. Supporting his contention is the fact that Audrey Rose died at 8:20 A.M. on October 3, 1965, and Ivy Templeton was born at 8:22 on

the same day.

The Templetons react with hostility to Hoover's claim that his daughter has been reborn in Ivy. But when they return home, they find Ivy having a terrible nightmare—a full-fledged psychotic episode. She screams and cries, and her hands spontaneously burn when she touches a cold window. It is as if she is experiencing the last fiery moments of Audrey Rose's short life! The Templetons are unable to stop Ivy's seizure, and Hoover shows up. He is the only one who can soothe their daughter, and she goes to him and calls him "Daddy." The Templetons are terrified by this development, but Mrs. Templeton slowly begins to believe Hoover's bizarre story. Mr. Templeton is not so open-minded, and he picks a fight with Hoover.

On another night, Ivy's nightmares grow worse, and the girl injures herself. Aware that only Hoover can help her daughter, Mrs. Templeton invites Audrey Rose's father up to the apartment. At this point, Hoover reveals what he wants. He feels that he is Ivy's spiritual father because of Audrey Rose. He worries for her young soul because it was reborn so quickly after Audrey Rose's death. He fears that Ivy will die unless somehow they can nurture Audrey Rose and see that she learns something of life and beauty this time around.

Mr. Templeton again attacks Hoover, and Hoover responds by taking Ivy to his apartment without permission. This is just the excuse Mr. Templeton has been awaiting, and the police promptly arrest Hoover for abduction and kidnapping. The trial becomes a media sensation when Hoover's defense attorney presents his case and the "reincarnation defense," as the press calls it. Witnesses at the trial include an Indian maharishi, who testifies that the soul lives forever, beyond the limited existence of the body. Another witness, Mary Lou Sides, recalls Audrey Rose's death in horrifying detail. Meanwhile, at St. Luke's School, Ivy's behavior grows worse. She seems drawn to flames and almost crawls face-first into a bonfire! This incident convinces Mrs. Templeton that if her daughter's life is to be saved, then Mr. Hoover must be a part of it. Stubborn Mr. Templeton refuses to drop the charges, and instead arranges a test to prove that Ivy is not Audrey Rose.

With the judge's permission, a hypno-therapist regresses Ivy. He

takes her back to her eighth birthday party, then her fourth, then back to the womb, and finally ... the life before. Under hypnosis, Ivy suddenly relives the burning death of Audrey Rose, proving the reincarnation defense in front of a jury. Ivy's face spontaneously burns and there are problems releasing her from hypnosis. In a horrible moment, Ivy dies. The Templetons are grief-stricken, but Hoover understands that his daughter's soul has been set free at last. Some time later, he takes Ivy's ashes to India to help her eternal soul mend itself.

COMMENTARY: Whenever director Robert Wise applies his considerable talents to film, it is a cause for rejoicing. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *The Haunting* (1963) remain genre high-water marks even decades after their release. Yet sometimes in Wise's work there are issues of pace and excitement. Quite simply, his films don't always get to that level. Movies such as *The Andromeda Strain* (1971) and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) reveal the hand of an intellectual rather than emotional director. It is that Robert Wise, the one of almost clinical detachment, who helms the reincarnation drama *Audrey Rose*. In some senses the approach works for the material, granting reincarnation a fair and sturdy argument that stands up to debate. But in other situations, such as the tragic ending, the film doesn't seem to have the heart to go along with the brain.

Looking at many of Wise's genre productions, it is clear he tends toward the realistic school of filmmaking rather than the formalist (except, importantly, in *The Haunting*). His compositions reveal a preference for long shots and deep focus, though horror is usually a more expressive genre. Yet, Wise's restrained attention to technical detail is also what makes his films smart, and he proffers a much-admired documentary style. The final moments of *The Andromeda Strain* (1971) are among the most suspenseful put to film, but Wise has achieved that effect not by manipulating audience feelings, but by going as far as possible (in a genre production) with attention to detail and "realistic" characters. By the time of that film's conclusion, the audience has received a primer in the operation of the film's science lab, and so understands perfectly the consequences of the countdown that closes it. It is suspenseful because audiences understand what is at stake, not because Wise

overdoses on formalist style.

Audrey Rose, however, is not the story of a scientist's efforts to diagnose an extraterrestrial-based plague, or the documentary-like voyage of a starship on an emergency mission (the plot of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*). It is a personal story about a bereaved father, Hoover, hoping to contact the spirit of his "dead" daughter in a new, reincarnated life. The audience wants to feel the tragedy of Hoover's situation, and Wise manages that. But his clinical detachment from the story at hand leads him to make a fatal blunder in the film's conclusion. Young Ivy Templeton (the spirit of Audrey Rose) dies at the conclusion of the film, and Hoover and Mrs. Templeton accept that death in "peace." There are no histrionics and, even though the death is a shock, very few character fireworks. Instead, the philosophy of reincarnation is brought up, designed to provide comfort.

Quite simply, that doesn't work. Human beings are emotional creatures who form incredibly tight bonds with those people in units we call "families." Whether or not Ivy's tortured soul is at rest is hardly the point. The point is that she is dead and gone, lost forever from the universe that the Templetons and Mr. Hoover inhabit. Yes, some day she may be reincarnated, but in the here and now a girl is dead. The film never grapples with the most important issue arising from this death. Was it right for Mr. Hoover to sit by and permit the forcing of Ivy's "memories" of a previous life knowing that such knowledge would trigger her bizarre form of "schizophrenia" and ultimately result in her death? The pursuit of knowledge is one thing, but the price is too high in *Audrey Rose*, and Wise's film does not seem to understand that. It lacks the emotional barometer to realize even that it has lost its audience, that Ivy's death is a tragic, upsetting thing, regardless of "karmic" consequences.

On a much more superficial level, it is hard not to view *Audrey Rose* as a variation of *The Exorcist* (1973), though the directing, writing and performances in the film are superlative. If looked at in very general terms, both stories involve a young girl's personality "switch," and a strange (paranormal) condition that cannot be diagnosed, whether it is possession or reincarnation. Medicine does

not help, and the girl's mother grows worried and desperate about her daughter's changes. At the same time, there is introduced a stranger who can help (Hoover in *Audrey Rose*, Fathers Merrin and Karras in *The Exorcist*). Even stylistically there are some similarities. The scenic tour of Washington, D.C., with Burstyn and Blair in *The Exorcist* has been superseded by a similarly scenic interlude with Mason and Swift in Central Park. When Ivy is "possessed" by Audrey Rose, she becomes violent and terrifying, much like Regan MacNeil, only without the pea soup. Both films also attempt to end with uplift, an understanding of a larger universe ... yet both leave the audience with grave misgivings about human existence. In *The Exorcist*, the feelings engendered at the ending feel intentional, in *Audrey Rose*, they feel more accidental, less sure-footed.

Despite emotional flaws and a superficial similarity to the blockbuster *The Exorcist*, *Audrey Rose* does have much to recommend it. It is a good, if flawed film, and it is easy to discern why Wise did not sentimentalize the story. The paranormal, after all, has a reputation as bunk, and Wise's *modus operandi* is to make it all as believable as possible. When Hoover reveals details of Ivy's life, Wise cuts to those items his words describe, such as the curtains in her bedroom, thus forging a visual link to let the audience know that his story is true. Wise also uses a lot of rain in the picture, an important element since it was raining the night Audrey Rose died in a car accident. The rain continues to fall during Ivy's emotional breakdowns, hence subtly reminding viewers of the link between incarnations. Wise also artfully contrasts religious beliefs, balancing an Indian chant against girls singing in a Catholic girls' school. The connection is obvious: one religion is given a stamp of approval in the west despite its inherent contradictions while the other, an Eastern belief, is scorned as "bunk."

Audrey Rose's search for legitimacy takes the story to the realm of the legal. Knowing that many people, including critics reviewing the film, feel that reincarnation is malarkey, Wise takes the paranormal concept to the one place it can be proven concretely: the courts. The film ends in a legal battle in which Wise builds a legitimate and compelling case for the philosophy of reincarnation. This is a bold way to go, but perhaps, ultimately, a mistake. Though

Wise seeks a legal stamp of approval for the belief in reincarnation, he fails to understand that belief is an emotional issue, not one that can be legislated from the bench.

Ultimately, Wise seeks validity in one other realm: science. Here, Wise is again on familiar ground. The audience is again treated to the stark whites and grays, the antiseptic environments, and the clinical detachment that Wise so favored in *The Andromeda Strain* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. A hypnotist (a remarkable Norman Lloyd) uses psychiatry to “regress” Ivy back to her brief life as Audrey Rose. The methodical Wise goes through every detail of this process in a long, elaborate scene that feels absolutely real. It is an effective scene, but again, the detachment is too much, and one feels Wise is too cold. Ivy dies at the end, a victim of the process he has laid out in such loving detail. Then, terribly, Ivy’s mother accepts her death as part of the cycle of life ... denying the audience the opportunity and time to grieve for the loss of a very sweet child. Like the legal aspects of the story, the scientific aspects overshadow what should remain a very human story.

It is rewarding that *Audrey Rose* goes to great lengths to validate its premise, and one can quite simply never praise a film too highly for “thinking.” But, in the final analysis, some of the film’s arguments are weak. One point of debate seems to state, “can seven million Indians be wrong?” That is not foolproof logic. And early in the film, Hopkins (as Hoover) reports that Ivy is actually a product of Mrs. Templeton and him. But if a soul goes from life to life, how does Hoover know he played a part in the creation of Audrey Rose’s soul at all? How does he know her tragic soul did not originate in *another* previous life? One thing is for certain: Hoover is not physically or genetically responsible for Ivy’s life, and claiming that he “made” her soul hardly make senses either. So, even with all of Wise’s documentary-like bells and whistles in courtrooms and hospitals, the plot does not hold up to logic.

Yet *Audrey Rose* is worth seeing. It is a victim of a flawed approach, of flawed thinking, but many scenes are accomplished with remarkable panache (such as the abrupt, documentary-like prologue in which the audience sees the P.O.V. of Hoover’s wife as a rogue vehicle darts suddenly onto the road...). Wise is a gifted director

and his misleading opening scenes, which make the film seem like a kidnapping or stalking plot, are also effectively shot. If the film only had the heart to match its head...

***Bloodsucking Freaks* (1977) [NO STARS]**

Cast & Crew

CAST: Seamus O'Brien (Sardu); Louie de Jesus (Ralphus); Viju Krem, Dan Fauci, Niles McMaster, Alan Dellay, Ernie Pysher, Helen Thompson, Carol Mara, Alphonso, Lynette Sheldon, Karen Fraser, Saiyanidi, Linda Small, Illa Howe, Janis Beaver, Michelle Craig, Erica Wolfe, Rita Montone, Carol Henry, Joann Friedman, Juliet Graham, Arlana Blue, George Davalso, Gail Renay, Judy Best, Athena Anderson, Sharani Gomez, Suzanne Wall, Evalyna Wade, Robert Kirsh.

CREW: Alan C. Margolin Presents a Joel M. Reed Production, *Bloodsucking Freaks*. *Assistant Camera:* John Coleone. *Sound:* Freddie Rottnest. *Gaffer:* Stephen DeVita. *Grips:* Ben Jennings, Richard Louis. *Continuity:* Maxo Gray. *Production Assistant:* Daniel Treger. *Make-up and Special Effects:* Bob O'Bradovich. *Choreography:* Gyles Fontain. *Music Recording:* Michael Lobel. *Percussion:* Cleve Polar. *Music:* Michael Sahl. *Cinematography:* Gerry Toll. *Post-production Recording:* Valhn Films. *Art Gallery Scene:* UnaBare Gallery. *Casting:* Dorothy Palmer. *Edited by:* Victor Kanefsky, Joel R. Herson. *Produced by:* Alan C. Margolin. *Written and Directed by:* Joel M. Reed.

SYNOPSIS: The sadistic Sardu believes that he can mix theater and sadism to produce great art. In his stage show, he oversees the bloody humiliation, torture and murder of beautiful naked women in front of a rapt audience. He begins the show with an iron tourniquet and ends it with a woman's death, but people in his audience, including a critic, believe it is all a pitiful act.

Sardu next moves on to the art of dismemberment. He sends his perverse and diminutive assistant, Ralphus, to cut off a woman's hand, and then remove and eat her eyeball. After this scene, the critic refuses to review the show for fear it will attract an audience if he gives it publicity. Angry, Sardu gives orders for Ralphus to abduct the critic. In exchange, Ralphus gets to oversee Sardu's sadomasochist punishment.

The critic is captured and forced to watch as Sardu electrocutes another innocent woman. Then he tells the critic of his new plan: he wants to produce a ballet combining sadism and dance. To that end he kidnaps the prominent ballerina Natasha de Natalie and coerces her to perform in his show. When she refuses, Sardu tortures more women.

Natasha's boyfriend, a football player named Tom Maverick, seeks the help of the police when he learns his girlfriend is missing. Detective Tucci of the NYPD, a corrupt cop, takes the case, but secretly suspects Maverick is responsible for foul play against Natasha. While Tom and Tucci look for her, Natasha witnesses further atrocities. Refusing to dance, she watches one woman tortured on a rack, and another decapitated by a guillotine. A ballerina friend's feet are cut off at her ankles by a chainsaw, and finally Natasha agrees to dance.

Sardu's strange ballet commences, with a suspicious Tucci and Tom in the audience. On-stage, Natasha dances her way to the captured film critic and beats him to death in a style in keeping with Sardu's demented choreography. After the show, Maverick and Tucci set out to rescue Natasha. They capture Sardu and tie him to the rack. The unscrupulous Tucci, however, is devoured by Sardu's cage of feral women when he attempts to steal the madman's fortune. Brainwashed forever now by Sardu, Natasha kills Tom with blunt force. The caged women, after dining on Tucci, break free of their captivity and kill Ralphus and Sardu. They eat the private parts of these two madmen on hoagie sandwiches...

COMMENTARY: Why, might one ask, would anyone, least of all a reviewer, expect anything positive of a film entitled *Bloodsucking Freaks*? Well, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) boasts a pretty exploitative title too, and is a great horror film. The title *Psycho*

does not look particularly promising on a marquee either, for that matter. So it was with an open mind that this author watched *Bloodsucking Freaks*. Unfortunately, what followed the opening credits was not just a bad film, but probably the worst film covered in this text. Not only are all the performances terrible and the technical aspects of the film inept, but *Bloodsucking Freaks* offers nothing except a litany of obscenities against women. It is a vile little film.

When socially minded critics complain that that horror films are misogynistic, this must be the picture they were thinking of, because *Bloodsucking Freaks*' idea of humor is to see women completely demeaned. One female has her buttocks used as a dartboard (a grotesque scene played to honky-tonk music). "Her mouth will make an interesting urinal," Sardu says of another woman, declaring his intention to use her as a toilet. There are women in cages, women whose nipples are electrocuted on stage, and a woman decapitated by a saw. In one thoroughly nauseating scene, a school-age girl is viciously caned, then decapitated. After her head is severed, Ralphus uses it for purposes of sodomy. It's all disgusting, and it appeals to the worst instincts of viewers. It is a leering, sick film that advocates the humiliation and abuse of women.

Now, some people may say that this is all in good fun, and that this review takes the film far too seriously. Not so. Believe it or not, there is a place in horror films for people (men or women) to face terrible abuse. *Last House on the Left* (1972), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Kiss the Girls* (1998) are three genre films that saw women enslaved and destroyed by vicious, terrible men. Yet those films were not offensive because the subject matter was given appropriate weight. The humiliation wasn't passed off as adolescent, over-the-top humor as it is in *Bloodsucking Freaks*. Sure, the evil Sardu and Ralphus get their comeuppance in the end, after the longest 90 minutes on record, but, notably, their demise is at the hands of women reduced to cannibalism and savagery. Even in victory, women are objects of derisive laughter. There's something inherently sick about a movie that finds the torture and degradation of human beings to be a subject of humor.

Still, it is possible, no doubt, that even this material could have been successful, were a little more (well, a lot more...) talent involved. The plot is sort of like a pornographic *Theatre of Blood* (1973), and there are plenty of jokes about critics and art. The film asks: where should the line be drawn in the art world? When is something art, and when is it trash?

Well, in response, the line is drawn here, with *Bloodsucking Freaks*. It isn't art. It's inept, distasteful, and disgusting. In the film itself, the critic refuses to review Sardu's act for fear that even his panning of the material will draw attention to it. This reviewer is tempted to follow that critic's lead and help this particular picture fade away into obscurity.

The Car (1977) * * ½

Critical Reception

"The movie degenerates into a ho-hum piece of hackwork before the end of the second reel ... but there is a marvelous opening sequence where the car chases two bicyclists through Utah's Zion National Park, its horn bleating ... as it gains on them and finally runs them down. There's something working in that opening sequence, something that calls up a deep, almost primitive unease about the cars we zip ourselves up in, thereby becoming anonymous ... and perhaps homicidal."—Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, a Berkley Book, 1981, page 164.

"...another underrated suspense shocker. A second look reveals the film to be a fast-paced thriller, strong on atmosphere and with better-than-average special effects."—Frank Manchel, *An Album of Modern Horror Films*, Franklin Watts, Publisher, 1983, page 81.

"...has all the ingredients of a parody, although someone has made the mistake of doing it

straight.... The performances are terrible—thin and overwrought in the manner of actors trying to improvise without an idea in their heads.”—
Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, May 14, 1977,
page 14.

“Interminably drawn out, with some good special effects, but its characters hauled straight out of the cracker-barrel.”—Tom Milne, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 136.

Cast & Crew

CAST: James Brolin (Wade Parent); Kathleen Lloyd (Lauren); John Marley (Everett); R.G. Armstrong (Amos Clements); John Rubinstein (John Morris); Elizabeth Thompson (Margie); Roy Jenson (Roy Mott); Kim Richards (Lynn Marie); Kyle Richards (Deborah); Kate Murtagh (Mrs. McDonald); Robert Phillips (Metcalf); Doris Dowling (Bertha); Henry O'Brien (Chas); Eddie Little Sky (Denton); Lee McLaughlin (Marvin); Margaret Wiley (Navajo Woman); Read Morgan (MacGruder); Ernie Orsatti (Dalton); Joshua Davis (Jimmy); Geraldine Keams (Donna); Mark Hamilton (Al Ashbury); John Moto (Parker); Melody Thomas (Suzie Pullbrook); Bob Woodlock (Pete Keil); James Hawley (Thompson); Louis Welch (Berry); Bryan O'Byrne (Wally); Don Keefer (Dr. Pullbrook); Steve Gravers (Mr. Mackey); Tony Brande (Joe); Ronny Cox (Luke).

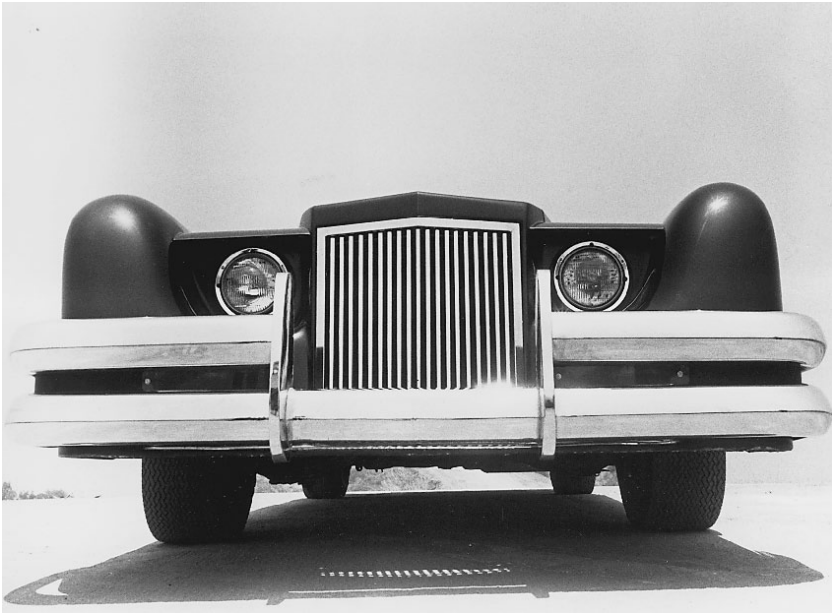
CREW: Universal Studios Presents *The Car. Music:* Leonard Rosenman. *Art Director:* Loyd S. Papez. *Film Editor:* Michael McCroskey. *Special Visual Effects:* Albert Whitlock. *Director of Photography:* Gerald Hirschfeld. *Screenplay:* Dennis Shryack, Michael Butler and Lane Slate. *Story by:* Dennis Shryack and Michael Butler. *Produced by:* Marvin Bridt and Elliot Silverstein. *Directed by:* Elliot Silverstein. *Set Decorator:* John McCarthy. *Sound:*

Jim Alexander. *Associate Film Editor*: Todd Ramsay. *Sound Editor*: John M. Stacy. *Music Editor*: Bette Biery. *Transportation Manager*: Alby Thomas. *Car Customizing*: George Barris. *Unit Production Manager*: Frank Arrigo. *First Assistant Director*: Gary Daigler. *Second Assistant Director*: Robert Latham Brown. *Make-up*: Rick Sharp. *Hairstylist*: Brenda Boyd. *Stunt Coordinator*: Everett Greach. *Titles*: Universal Title. *Color by*: Technicolor. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 90 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Oh Great Brothers of the Night, who rideth out,
upon the hot winds of Hell, who dwelleth in the
devil’s lair; move and appear.”—Anton Le Vay

SYNOPSIS: On a hot day in the California desert of Thomas County, two young bicyclists are attacked, run off the road and murdered by a strange black car. Later, near the town of Santa Ynez, the same car crushes a hitchhiker, Johnny Norris, just outside the Clements place. Everett, the town sheriff, and Wade Parent, his best deputy, investigate the crime and learn from Mr. Amos Clements, a wife beater, about the odd-looking car that ran over Norris some four times before streaking into the desert. Later, the police find the dead bicyclists and realize they have some demented driver on their hands. Later that very night, the malevolent car sneaks downtown and kills Sheriff Everett, leaving Wade in charge. An eyewitness to the murder, an old Indian woman, warns that bad things are coming and, oddly, that the car has no driver.



Road Hog: The mysterious automobile of *The Car* (1977).

Meanwhile, Wade's girlfriend, the plucky Lauren, rehearses with her marching band for a big upcoming parade. During a sandstorm, the malicious car strikes again, killing innocent men and women even as most of the students and teachers flee to a cemetery. They find sanctuary there, and the car does not follow them inside the graveyard.

Wade and the remaining police force drive in to the rescue, but the car has fled the scene. One police unit pursues the car up a mountain, and it retaliates by tipping the cruiser off the edge of a high precipice. The evil car then purposely does a horizontal flip in the middle of the road, smashing two more police vehicles and landing safely—ready for more destruction. On motorcycle, Wade intercepts the black monster car, which stops just feet from him. Wade empties his pistol into the windshield of the car, but the vehicle is impervious to weapons fire. Curious, Wade tries to peer inside the hellish vehicle, but is struck unconscious as it swings its driver's side door into him.

While Wade recovers, Lauren agrees to spend the night with his

girls. Chas, a Native American policeman, escorts her to her house so she can get some things for the evening, then leaves to check on his own family. The car takes advantage of Lauren's isolation, driving through her living room and killing her. As Wade grieves, the sensitive Deputy Luke offers some explanations. He believes that the car did not attack the children in the cemetery because it could not cross into hallowed ground. And, it broke into Lauren's house because she cursed it earlier in the day. Wade is suspicious of these rationales, but realizes he must destroy the car before more lives are lost. With the help of blasting contractor Amos Clements, the police lay a trap for the car.

When the car shows up in Wade's garage, he lures it to a canyon, racing from the monster vehicle on his motorcycle. The car pursues, and as Wade climbs his way out of the canyon, Luke, Clements and the remaining police officers of Santa Ynez detonate the explosives: bringing hundreds of tons of stone down on the car.

In the explosion, a devilish specter is briefly seen by some of the men, but the car remains trapped and silent deep below the scattered rock of the canyon...

COMMENTARY: Of all of *Jaws*' cinematic children, the goofiest and most entertaining (after *Piranha*) may be Universal's *The Car*. Like *Grizzly* (1976) before it, *The Car* slavishly remakes *Jaws*, but there's some daffy invention, some might say inspiration, in the fact that the great white shark of Spielberg's 1975 masterpiece has been supplanted by a big black automobile. Replacing a natural-born killer with an unnatural one is an interesting, if bizarre, touch, but it makes almost no difference in the story, and all the characters in the film behave as if the malevolent car is indeed, nothing but a land shark.

The Car adheres to the *Jaws* template in just about every way imaginable, minus the shark of course. Deputy Wade might as well be Chief Brody, and for purposes of originality he's been given two daughters instead of two sons. The banter between Wade and his ill-fated girlfriend, Lauren, likewise recalls the charming dialogue flights of fancy in the Brody household. The actors, to their credit, uniformly perform as if they are in *Jaws*. One should be so lucky...

The local color of Amity Island has been replaced with the local color of Santa Ynez. Here, there is a music teacher's uptight administrator, the town wife-beater, and a short-lived sheriff who remembers his "first time." It's all an attempt to make the town seem authentic, and it is all stuff ripped right out of *Jaws*.

And, since there are no beaches to keep open in the deserts of Santa Ynez, instead there is a high school parade rehearsal that becomes a target for the malicious antagonist. Since this predator swims on the streets, a parade equals sunbathers, or at least that was the thinking.

The main problem with the transplanted setting of *The Car* is that it is not exploited well. *Jaws* is scary (and timeless) because human beings are not masters in the realm of the ocean. Humans cannot see the horrors that dwell beneath the waves. The desert could have played on the same fears, but we do not feel the effect of it as a real location, as one might in Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) or the films of Jack Arnold. The desert is a strange place: a world of desolation, strange sounds, and great emptiness. Had the audience been made to feel in *The Car* that the realm of the desert is the motivating force behind the car attacks, or at least a silent participant, the film might have been stronger. Instead, it just feels like a contrived "switcheroo." *Jaws* took place near water, *The Car* takes place away from water. Instead of frolicking swimmers, the victims in *The Car* are frolicking bicyclists. It's a simple solution for an exploitation film of limited ambition.

The car attacks are staged with relish, often filmed from the same P.O.V. style shots that informed much of *Jaws*. Of course, Spielberg staged many of those shots in that "subjective" camera manner because Bruce the mechanical shark malfunctioned, and was forced to shoot around his temperamental and critical prop. Apparently unaware of that, *The Car* chooses the same tactic, even though its mechanical villain, the car, is quite mobile. Yet what is truly humorous about *The Car* is that none of the characters think it is odd or disquieting in the slightest that the town is being stalked by a devil vehicle. In one sequence, a man on a horse actually rides in front of the car to "distract it," thus behaving as though the vehicle were a living entity. He is assuming that, like a shark, the car

operates on instinct, pursuing the nearest “food source.” That’s ridiculous, of course, because a car is not a biological organism driven, like a shark, to feed. Still, one has to admire the film for its brass. At times during *The Car* it seems as though the *Jaws* screenplay were photocopied, but the word “shark” has been whited out and replaced by the word “car.” Nothing else, not even the characters’ reactions to the central threat, has been touched.

In fairness to *The Car*, it builds up a sense of mystery and suspense. Where did the car come from? Who built it? Where was it built? What is its motive? Who drives the car? Is it alive? These questions can’t help but be asked, and the fiery climax, in which a devilish specter arises out of an explosion, hints at a supernatural answer without being predictable. In addition to this original touch, the film is appealing in the same manner as other highway bound horrors like *Duel* (1971), *Race with the Devil* (1975), or *Christine* (1983). For whatever reason, audiences are drawn to films about chases, murderous vehicles and smashed metal, and those aspects of *The Car* are well handled. At times, fast motion photography is employed to heighten the pace of the pursuits, and overall there is a sense of momentum, even if the film is inherently ridiculous. As a horror demolition derby, *The Car* really is fun, even a guilty pleasure.

This is one of those films in which it would behoove characters to look both ways before crossing the street, but instead they perpetually step off the curb and are mowed down by the evil automobile. The moments when the car arrives, heralded in the dark by glowing headlights, or in the day time by a glare from a distant windshield, reveal evil’s presence on the scene in ways that are actually scary. *The Car* may be a stupid movie, but like so many 1970s B movies, it is charming in its naïve imitation of a far superior material.

Claws

CAST: Jason Evers (Jason Monroe); Leon Ames (Commissioner); Anthony Caruso (Henry); Carly Layton (Chris); Glenn Sipes (Howard); Buck Young (Pilot).

CREW: *Directed by:* Richard Bansbach and R.E. Pierson. *Produced by:* Chuck D. Keen. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 100 minutes.

DETAILS: A rip-off of *Jaws* (1975), by way of *Grizzly* (1976). Another crazed Grizzly bear attacks, this time in beautiful Alaska. Lacks even the rudimentary talents of a William Girdler.

The Crater Lake Monster (1977) *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Richard Cordella (Sheriff Steve Hanson); Mark Siegel (Mitch Kowalski); Richard Garrison (Dan Turner); Michael Hoover (Ross Conway); Glenn Roberts (Arnie Chabot); Bob Hyman (Dr. Richard Calkins); Kacey Cobb (Susan Patterson); Suzanne Lewis (Paula Conway); Marv Eliot (Jack Fuller); Garry Johnston (Blackmailer); Sonny Shepard (Robber); John Crowder (Mechanic); Susy Claycomb (Waitress); Hal Scharn (Birdwatcher); Mike Simmons (Store Clerk); Mary Winford (Lady Customer); Jim Goeppinger (Villager); Joe Sasway (Ferguson).

CREW: Crown International Pictures presents a William R. Stromberg Production, *The Crater Lake Monster*. *Original Story and Screenplay by:* William R. Stromberg and Richard Cardella. *Produced and Directed by:* William R. Stromberg. *Director of Photography:* Paul Gentry. *Production Design:* Roger Heisman. *Second Unit Director:* Paul Gentry, Roger Heisman. *Editors:* Nancy Grossman, Steve Nielson. *Assistant to Editors:* Meg Hodgetts. *Make-up:* Elaine Stromberg, Meg Hodgetts. *Special Effects:* Bill Dickinson. *Key Grip:* Jerry Osteen. *Sound:* Hal Scharn. *Special Mechanical Effects:* Steve Neill. *Stop Motion Supervisor:* Dave Allen. *Special Miniature Effects:* Tom Scherman. *Illustrator:* Armando Norte. *Songs by:* James West. *Titles:* Pacific Title. *Color:*

Metrocolor. Filmed in Fantamation. *M.P.A.A.*

Rating: PG. *Running Time:* 80 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A group of University students led by Dan Turner, Susan Patterson and Professor Calkins discover an Indian cavern in an abandoned mine. They find drawings of Native American warriors fighting a strange dinosaur. Unfortunately, the cavern collapses when a meteor strikes Crater Lake nearby, and the discovery is lost.

The meteor at the bottom of Crater Lake is so hot that the students can't get close enough to examine it, but it has an unusual effect: it warms a fertile egg at the bottom of the lake, and an amphibious dinosaur is born. This monster soon kills a hiker, then some cattle, and even a fisherman who has rented a boat from local yokels Mitch and Arnie. Sheriff Hanson leads the way in the investigation, but is baffled by the bizarre deaths.

Meanwhile, a drunk entertainer and his wife, *en route* from Las Vegas, stop at Crater Lake when their car breaks down. They rent a boat, go out on the lake, and narrowly survive a dinosaur attack. They send the monster scurrying back into the water when they burn the rented boat with gasoline. Accordingly, Hanson soon orders Crater Lake off-limits, closing down Arnie and Mitch's boat business. Perpetually drunk, rednecks Arnie and Mitch now have a lot of time on their hands.



Lizard versus machine: A bulldozer and a stop-motion dinosaur prepare to have it out in *The Crater Lake Monster* (1977). That's a stop-motion redneck in the monster's mouth...

Hanson chases down a murderous bank robber to the shores of Crater Lake, where the crook is promptly eaten by the dinosaur. The monster then attacks the sheriff, but he escapes in his patrol car and goes to see Professor Calkins. Calkins photographs the monster's footprints, and re-enlists Dan and Susan to help them deal with an aquatic dinosaur much like the one they saw depicted in the destroyed cave drawing. They plot to capture the dinosaur, but Hanson would rather kill it.

The monster attacks again, as the town debates options. Dan, Susan, Hanson, Mitch and Arnie confront the monster. In the end, it's a battle between a prehistoric monster and a bulldozer, with Arnie as casualty. The sheriff defeats the dinosaur, but a great scientific discovery is lost.

COMMENTARY: "Steve, we're up against something here that goes against every natural law," warns one of the characters in *The*

Crater Lake Monster, a low-budget monster film about a Loch Ness-style dinosaur awakened after centuries of slumber. The same fellow might have added that any reviewer of this film is up against something that goes against every rule of good filmmaking: a half-baked, plotless mess that wastes much of its sparse 80 minute running time on the purportedly amusing escapades of two unwashed rednecks named Mitch and Arnie. This movie offers viewers an unusual glimpse of Hell as these two witless characters bumble about cracking stupid jokes, in search of a plot ... any plot.

The misadventures of Arnie and Mitch in *The Crater Lake Monster* prove an old rule of redneck comedy relief. It states: the only thing worse than dumb redneck comedy is when dumb redneck comedy is underlined by “funny music.” That’s the real horror of *The Crater Lake Monster*: watching two white-trash drunks living their moonshine-addled life to “humorous” musical compositions, longing to go to a hoe-down, or plotting to make it rich with some stupid scheme. One is left gaping in amazement that director Stromberg allowed this so-called comic relief to take over, and essentially kill, his film.

King Kong (1933) was great not only because of its revolutionary special effects, but because it was a well-written, well-acted adventure that didn’t talk down to the audience. Perhaps more importantly, the film had a sense of wonder. By contrast, *Crater Lake Monster* can’t cut it even as low-budget horror. There is never any suspense, no scares, and zero momentum.

Without Arnie and Mitch doing an early variation on the Ernest character, *The Crater Lake Monster* might have been a lot better. At the beginning of the film, there are some good tracking shots as the students flee a collapsing cave, and one has hopes that this could be a little, low-budget gem. Then there are some picturesque location shots of a boat cruising the lake, and another nice composition involving a fog settling on the body of water. In these moments, one is reminded that “the monster in the water” genre is one that has been good before, notably in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1956) and *Jaws* (1975). Even recently, the genre was unearthed for *Lake Placid* (1999) and *Anaconda* (1997). It’s a sub-genre with possibilities when done right, but this film is absolutely undone by

its focus on two bumbling rednecks.

The most unintentionally humorous moment in the film occurs when Arnie is killed at the climax, and *The Crater Lake Monster* attempts to sound a note of tragedy. Oh, the meaningful death of white trash...

Although not as irritating as its main characters, *The Crater Lake Monster* has another problem, this one with plot. Specifically, there isn't one. The film follows a few characters (the students), then another (the sheriff), then the rednecks, then two vacationers, then a bank robber, then the sheriff again and finally the students and the professor. Any connection between scenes cannot be proven empirically, but must be interpreted from circumstantial evidence. It's a bit too stream of consciousness. Scenes pile upon scenes without rhyme or reason, and there is no grasp of the concept of time. Suddenly, in the middle of the film, it is revealed that six months have passed since the meteor fell in the film's opening. Though the running time of the film feels like six months, this span of time is not accounted for within the story at all. There is no sense that this "terror" is lingering beyond a few days. People don't age and the seasons don't change.

This is a low-budget film with low-budget special effects. The stop-motion plesiosaur is acceptable, but the full-scale monster head often shown on camera looks like an inflatable raft. Perhaps more damagingly, the monster has not been animated as a real "monstrous" threat, but more as an animal on the loose. Thus, the dinosaur isn't scary in the film, just kind of interesting as it ambles about in search of its next meal. A more ferocious-looking opponent might have spiced the action up a bit.

The actors are even more lifeless than their tabletop counterpart. Actor Bob Hyman portrays the film's man of science, and so as to stress his character's intelligence, Hyman continually smokes a pipe ... not exactly a subtle touch. The perpetual pipe smoking doesn't help convey much of a character, and Hyman's professor must be the slackest academician on film. He isn't interested in the cave drawings, or the meteor crash, so just what the hell is he a professor of? The other performances are terrible—obviously those of amateurs and non-professionals.

Of all the two hundred films this author watched in preparation for this book, *The Crater Lake Monster* was one of the few he felt tempted to fast forward through. This is a film where literally nothing happens for ninety minutes, and Mitch and Arnie make the picture painful rather than merely dull. The special effects are interesting, representative of an obsolete technology (now replaced by CGI), but beyond a cursory look at Dave Allen's animation of the titular monster, this film is a giant zero. In its favor, the monster of *The Crater Lake Monster* is better represented on film than the beast of *Bog* (1978), a film with a virtually identical story.

***Day of the Animals* (1977) * * ½**

Critical Reception

“...an inept offering by rip-off specialist William Girdler, who had previously given us lame versions of both *The Exorcist* (*Abby*) and *Jaws* (*Grizzly*). This time he tackled Hitchcock's classic *The Birds* (1963) in similar lackluster fashion, pitting animals against aerosol-spritzing humans....”—Douglas Menville and R. Reginald, *Futurevisions: The New Golden Age of The Science Fiction Film*, Newcastle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985, page 43.

“...*The Birds* recycled by an equal-opportunity employer with an eye more on shock than suspense ... offers pretty scenery, and some repulsive animal attacks. Despite its putative concern for the environment, it is calculated more to incite terror than inspire restraint.”—Lawrence Van Gelder, *New York Times*, May 26, 1977, page C22.

“...directed with zest but let down by a clichéd script and wooden performances.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 41.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher George (Steve Buckner); Leslie

Nielsen (Paul Jenson); Lynda Day George (Terry Marsh); Richard Jaeckel (Professor MacGregor); Michael Ansara (Daniel Santee); Ruth Roman (Shirley Goodwyn); Paul Mantee (Roy Moore); Jon Cedar (Frank Young); Walter Barnes (Ranger Tucker); Andrew Stevens (Bob Denning); Bobby Porter (John Goodwyn); Susan Backline (Mandy Yang); Kathleen Bracken (Beth Hughes); Michelle Stacy (Little Girl); Gil Lamb (Old Man in Bar); Michael Andrews (Sheriff); Gertrude Lee (Ranger's Wife); Garrison True (TV Announcer); Jon Andrew Scott (Old Man in Bar).

CREW: An Edward L. Montoro Production of a William Girdler Film, *Day of the Animals*. *Filmed in:* TODD-AO35. *Color:* Deluxe. *Director of Photography:* Robert Sorrentino. *Production Supervisor:* Clarence Eurist. *Editor:* Bob Asman, James Mitchell. *Music:* Lalo Schifrin. *Screenplay:* William Norton, Eleanor E. Norton. *Based on a Story by:* Edward L. Montoro. *Directed by:* William Girdler. *2nd Unit Camera:* Tom McHugh. *Casting:* Marvin Page. *Make-up Created by:* Graham Meech-Burkestone. *Sound Effects:* Fred Brown. *Animals Furnished and Trained by:* Lou Schumacher, Monty Cox. *Assistant Directors:* Morris Abrams, Scott Adams, Billy Ray Smith. *Script Supervisor:* Sally Roddy. *Second Unit Script Supervisor:* Barbara Clark. *Dialogue Coach:* Garrison True. *Production Assistant:* Jon Heininger, John Woodward. *First Assistant Cameraman:* John White. *Second Assistant Cameraman:* Jim White. *Additional Animals Owned and Trained by:* Dennis Grisco, Dick Drake, Bob Riedell, George Toth, Lloyd Beebe. *Stunt Coordinator:* Monty Cox. *Sound Mixers:* Glenn Anderson, Al Overton. *Costumers:* Michael Faeth, Nancy Sales. *Property Master:* James Biggs. *Special Effects:* Sam Burney. *Location Equipment:* Cinemobile Systems. *Assistant Film Editor:* Charles Tetoni. *Photographic Effects:* CFI, Howard Anderson Co. *Music Editor:* Kenneth Hall. *Title Design:* Don

Record. *Post Production Facilities*: Samuel Goldwyn Studios. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 97 minutes.

P.O.V.

“In June 1974, Drs. F. Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina of the University of California startled the scientific world with their finding that fluorocarbon gases used in aerosol spray cans are seriously damaging the Earth’s protective ozone layer. Thus potentially dangerous amounts of ultra-violent rays are reaching the surface of our planet, adversely affecting all living things. This motion picture dramatizes what COULD happen in the near future if we continue to do nothing to stop the damage to nature’s protective shield for life on this planet.”—opening card of *Day of the Animals* (1977).

SYNOPSIS: Trail master Steve Buckner leads a two-week hiking expedition into the High Sierras. Several vacationers are flown up the mountainside in choppers to begin the vacation. But, while the group rests on a precipice, buzzards strafe them. The Native American among them, Daniel Santee, has never seen anything like this attack. Worse, it is strangely hot for this time of year, and a local news program announces a problem with the Earth’s ozone layer. The sun’s radiation may be causing unknown effects on people and animals ... especially in high altitudes.

The hiking troop comes across an abandoned campsite and sets up nearby. Santee and Buckner fear something dangerous is happening in the woods and post a watch. Despite this precaution, a crazed wolf sneaks into the camp perimeter and attacks one of the vacationers. Though the wolf is driven away by Buckner, the camper and her husband decide to walk to the nearest ranger station and call the trip quits. Another hiker, the pompous Mr. Jensen, is concerned about the group’s lack of weaponry.

Buzzards follow the married couple and attack the injured wife. She

is pecked incessantly and falls off a precipice to her death, leaving her husband to find his way alone. He soon finds the only survivor from the abandoned campsite: a little girl in shock. Meanwhile, tensions mount for the other hikers. They are out of food and a radio broadcast warns all campers to flee high altitudes because of ozone depletion.

In the town below, the U.S. army arrives, declaring martial law and evacuating the locales. At night, the sheriff survives when rats attack his house, but is aware Buckner's group is in terrible danger.

Up in the mountains, wild cats attack the hikers, and Buckner and the others repel them with fire. The next day, the group attempts to fish for food, but Jensen foments discontent and splits the group. Some campers remain with Steve (including Daniel and the beautiful Terry), while others elect to side with Jensen. Jensen's group almost immediately regrets that decision. Affected by the ozone, Jensen goes crazy and rapes one of his fellow hikers. Then, Jensen wrestles a bear bare handed and is killed. The survivors of Jensen's folly are then attacked by a pack of wild dogs. Only a mother and her little boy survive, seeking safety in a crashed chopper.

Buckner's group also runs afoul of the dogs. The group hides in a cabin, but the dogs break in, forcing them to flee. Buckner and his people board rafts and float down river, the dogs in hot pursuit.

Soon, the horror is over as the affected animals die of exposure to ultra-violet rays. The EPA arrives for a clean up as radiation decreases to normal levels. Buckner's group is rescued, as are those trapped in the chopper.

COMMENTARY: *When Animals Attack* might have been a more appropriate title for William Girdler's 1977 opus, *Day of the Animals*. The film, which had the misfortune to open the same day as *Star Wars* (1977), is much better than Girdler's *Jaws* knock-off *Grizzly* (1976), and is actually rather good from a purely visual perspective. Sadly, *Day of the Animals* falters in its script, which is populated by cardboard, uninteresting characters, and in some of its more ludicrously staged animal ambushes.

Girdler understands in *Day of the Animals* that how he reveals connections is just as important as the details of those connections. In this case, he forges a visual link between the sun high in the sky, and its impact on animals (and even people) far below. After the opening crawl lets viewers in on the premise of the film, that ultra-violet rays are damaging the creatures of the Earth, Girdler repeatedly fills his frame with shots of radiant sunlight, rings of light beaming outward from the blinding orb. Then, buttressing the cause/effect bond, he shows a vulture silhouetted against the sun, as well as other creatures who are “touched” by the dangerous light, from spiders and snakes to owls, bears and lions. This is not highbrow filmmaking, to be sure, but Girdler has the insight to reinforce his theme of nature gone awry with the right visuals. After *Grizzly* and *Abby*, that level of competence is a revelation.

When Girdler frames the sun as a character (and thus a motivating factor in the drama), in many of the hiking shots, the point is plain: that the sun is “sending” down the catalyst of this horror, some kind of “wrong” light. Girdler follows through with this conceit, depicting men late in the film affected adversely by the ever-present sun.

Impressively, Girdler utilizes his camera for the same purpose throughout the picture, building visual connections via composition. In one scene, the town sheriff worries about the ozone layer, and as he speaks on the subject, the camera leaves his side, probes out through a window, and settles on the image of a wild dog that is clearly not in its right mind. Again, the link between the ozone and its horrific effect is established cleanly, and it is done so using an accepted technique of filmmaking: camera movement (rather than crosscuts) between affector (sun) and affected (the animals).

Girdler also establishes a nice sense of place in *Day of the Animals*. There are more of his *Grizzly*-style aerial (by chopper) flybys of the Sierras. In fact, these shots, including one of a bear rearing up, may be straight out of *Grizzly*! Yet the scenes work, and Girdler gets good footage of a variety of animals, including big cats, birds and bears. It may be no more than the horror equivalent of a National Geographic Special, but location work such as this often gives a film

(especially a horror film) a more visceral sense of reality.

But *Day of the Animals*, in the final analysis, is not a very sturdy film. Prime among the complaints is the nature of the characters themselves: they seem to be generic victims that could have been plucked from dozens of horror pictures. There's the young boy raised by a single mom, the horny young couple, the unhappily married older couple, the beautiful news anchor out to romance the protagonist and get a great story, and, of course, a wise Native American man who is among the first to suspect something is wrong. As the lead, Christopher George is undistinguished and as bland as they come.

In a good film about a diverse group facing a crisis, like George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the character interactions and tensions are as important as the outside threat, whether it be zombies or animal attacks. In *Day of the Animals*, none of the characters seem very individual, and Leslie Nielsen's transformation into a psychopath is done without subtlety or charm "You lily-livered punk!" Nielsen shouts to one character just before killing him. Ultimately, Nielsen is killed not by his fellow hikers, who he has raped, attacked and intimidated, but by his insistence on wrestling a bear in hand-to-hand combat. By killing him off so easily, the film doesn't take the time to examine Nielsen's point of view. Is he right that the hikers should have been armed? Is he right that there should have been a contingency plan in case of emergency? Part of the charm of *Night of the Living Dead* was that hero Ben and antagonist Mr. Cooper had opposite points of view, but the film validated both. Ben was right to defend the upstairs of the farmhouse, just as Mr. Cooper was right to insist that everyone stay safe in the basement. The problem was, like Israel and Palestine, they just couldn't get past their personal dislike of one another. *Day of the Animals* doesn't manage the same kind of debate, and the characters are the lesser for it.

Another serious problem is that some of the animal attacks don't work. Bad rear-projection is used in one ridiculous scene, as a character is attacked by buzzards and falls to her death on (rear-projected) rocks far below. The rat attack on the sheriff's house is downright humorous, and it appears that off-screen crewmen are

tossing critters at a hapless actor's head. A dog attack forms the final assault in *Day of the Animals*, and proves another longstanding rule of horror movies: no matter how hard you try, dogs just look cute. That's the case here: the dogs aren't scary.

Some of the animal motivation is off too. Is it likely that, even if driven insane by exposure to ultra-violet rays, diverse animals such as mountain lions and bears would hunt humans in tandem? It is more believable that the animals would turn on each other rather than working together to attack man. The movie might have been more frightening that way, if a group of hikers landed in the middle of an animal free-for-all and never knew if they'd be pulled into the melee.

Finally, there's the matter of the resolution. The attacks just stop, and all is well again. One moment, dogs are nipping hungrily at the cast members, leaping on their make-shift raft as it navigates a river, and in the next sequence, it's all done ... finished. One senses that Girdler was trying for something on the level of *The Birds*—a battle that has ceased, a war that is coming, that kind of thing. He doesn't quite manage it, maybe because he's already explained too much. Hitchcock gave no explanation for the onslaught of birds, whereas Girdler states from the opening crawl why animals would be motivated to harm man.

Like all of William Girdler's films, *Day of the Animals* is well-aged 1970s nostalgia. This was the decade when pollution, ozone depletion, nuclear radiation, hormone therapy and other human mistakes caused attacks by frogs, rabbits, spiders, ants, rats, dogs and other animals. No decade has laid claim to these monstrosities in such aggressive fashion. Accordingly, *Day of the Animals* is so seventies in so many ways that it is worth watching to get a feel for the dreads of the decade. It isn't a particularly good film, and it isn't difficult to see why it was overshadowed at the box office by *Star Wars*. But, importantly, it was a step up for William Girdler, who was becoming a better exploitation director with each film he made. His last film, 1978's *The Manitou*, is probably his best.

Death Game (1977) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Sondra Locke (Jackson); Seymour Cassel (George Manning); Colleen Camp (Donna); Beth Brickell (Karen Manning); Ruth Warshawsky (Delivery Boy); Michael Kalmansohn (Mrs. Grossman).

CREW: First American Films, John B. Kelly, Continental Film Associates/Sunset Distributors Ltd., Larry Spiegel and Mel Bergman Present a Film by Peter Traynor, *Death Game*. *Director of Photography:* David Worth. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Jimmie Haskell. *Written by:* Anthony Overman, Michael Ronald Ross. *Executive Producers:* Mel Bergman, William Duffy. *Produced by:* Larry Spiegel, Peter Traynor. *Directed by:* Peter Traynor. *Film Editor:* David Worth. *“Good Old Dad” Lyrics by:* Iris Rainer, *Music by:* Jimmie Haskell, *Sung by:* The Ron Hicklin Singers. *“We’re Home” Lyrics by:* Guy Hemric, *Music by:* Jimmie Haskell, *Sung by:* Maxine Weldon. *Sound Effects:* Wayne Wahrman. *Assistant Film Editors:* Lee Stepansky, Chris Thule, Patrick McDowell. *Associate Producer:* John L. Moorehead. *Assistant Directors:* Wes MacAphee, Chris Christenberry. *Second Assistant Director:* Leslie Moulton. *Sound:* Leslie Shatz. *Boom Man:* Turner Browne. *Head Mixer:* Hal Watkins. *Scoring Mixer:* Ron Malo. *Concert Master:* Sid Sharp. *Music Recording:* Devonshire Studios, Los Angeles. *Production Design:* Peter Jamison, Jack Fisk and Company. *Set Dressers:* Eric Edel, Bill Paxton, Dan Martin, Michael Nevlen, Karin Haugse, Janet Stearns, Sissy Spacek. *Key Grip:* Bob Decker. *Grips:* Mike Popovich, Scott Robinson. *First Assistant Camera:* Terry Bowen. *Second Assistant Camera:* John LeBlanc, Peter Smokler. *San Francisco Production Coordinator:* Marcia Mielke. *Stunts:* Cyndi Swan, Paula Crist, Roger Creal. *Title Design:* Mary Meacham. *Wardrobe:* Aaron St. John, Todd Joy.

Script Supervisor: Cariline Davis. *Make-up:* Tino Zacchia. *Production Assistant:* Rick Wasserman. *Property Master:* Lowell Cannon. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 87 minutes.

P.O.V.

“This motion picture is based on a true story. It should serve to remind us that fate allows no man to insulate himself against the evil which pervades our society.”—opening card of *Death Game* (1977).

SYNOPSIS: When his wife is away visiting a sick relative, wealthy George Manning is left alone in his expensive west coast home. A storm rolls in and two beautiful young swingers, Donna and Jackson, arrive at his doorstep sopping wet and seeking shelter. George lets the girls in, allowing them to use his phone. He also gives them robes so they can dry off. Before long, Donna and Jackson strip down naked in George’s bathtub and seduce him. They make wild love all night.

The next morning, Donna and Jackson overstay their welcome. They make George breakfast, and Donna develops an unhealthy attraction to George, calling him “Daddy.” George repeatedly asks the duo to leave, but they are uncooperative. Instead, they make a mess of the house, destroy stereo equipment and spill food everywhere. When George threatens to call the police, Jackson reminds him that she and Donna are under age and can accuse him of statutory rape. Finally, Donna and Jackson agree to leave ... if George drives them. Acquiescing, George escorts them to the San Francisco bus station and puts the incident behind him.

Later, the two mad girls return to George’s house and ambush him. They knock him out and tie him up to his bed. They play dress up, drag George down the stairs, and humiliate him. When he attempts to escape, they tussle with him. Late into the night, a grocery delivery boy arrives with supplies and hears George’s screams for help. Donna and Jackson tackle the man and kill him, dumping his bleeding corpse into a fish tank. The two psychopaths then conduct a trial of George, accusing him of rape and perversion. They allow

him to testify on his own behalf, and he says that his family needs him. The mock court then deliberates and finds George guilty on all charges. He is to be executed at dawn.

While the hours tick away to daylight, the girls do further damage, murdering George's housecat and ruining the house. George attempts to break free again when Donna wants to make love to him for the last time, but Jackson knocks George out cold. At 6:00 A.M. the next morning, Donna and Jackson awaken George. They drag him to the bedroom and prepare to chop off his head with a cleaver. Then—inexplicably—they stop everything. They tell George it was “all a joke” and leave the house, hopping and skipping happily. As Donna and Jackson move on, a car suddenly appears on the road ahead of them and runs them down.

COMMENTARY: *Death Game* is a solid psycho thriller, a mid-decade, distaff version of *The Last House on the Left* (1972), but its field of debate is not retribution or violence, like the early Wes Craven motion picture, but sexual politics instead. An unabashedly feminist horror picture, *Death Game* depicts the murderous spree of two mentally unhinged women as they torture and humiliate a suburban husband and father (their perceived abuser) in the “safety” of his fancy, upper-middle-class home. Stylish, shocking and ruthless in its presentation of the feminist agenda, *Death Game* sticks to its guns with low budget energy and a real sense of how cinema can create unease through the marriage of appropriate visuals, sound, and effective direction.

Appropriately enough, *Death Game* commences with an on-screen card (quoted in the P.O.V. section) warning that no “man” can insulate himself from the horrors of society. The wording there is especially interesting, since it is gender specific, not referring to “humanity” as a whole. The first indication is, then, that it is men who have something to learn; men who are in denial about some facet of contemporary society.

From that launching point, the opening credits depict a montage of rough, primitive, children's drawings, all of which depict aspects of family or domestic life. These images are married to a theme song, a tune entitled “Good Old Dad.” In joining these two elements (the visual and the aural), the film further enunciates the psychological

(and feminist) foundations of its story, as well as providing a hint of explanation.

The drawings (of Valentine's Day hearts, of cats, and pointedly, of a father smoking a pipe) set up a vision of the world as seen by children. The drawings are innocent, "pure" and representative of childhood. The song, with pertinent lyrics, puts a slant on this seemingly ideal childhood. "Who is the man who made me what I am?" the cheerful, bouncy music asks. "Who spans my bottom when I'm bad?" it continues, answering all the questions that it is "dear old Dad." The very title of this song, "Good Old Dad," is meant ironically, pointedly contrasting with the seemingly pure and innocent illustrations. Thus *Death Game*, before it has even commenced its story proper, suggests that a father's participation in a child's life (a daughter's life) affects that life, sometimes negatively.

More to the point, a sexual role is further implied: that of corporal punishment as a form of inappropriate contact. This is, in fact, affirmed by the film's dialogue when the lead psycho, Jackson (Sondra Locke), transfers her feelings of rage towards her father to her new victim, George. She calls him "Daddy," and reveals that her father had sex with her, and that is the reason she has run away (and consequently "gone bad"). Again, the song suggests it is Daddy—a man—who made this psychotic woman unhinged. The music and opening credits immediately generate a feeling that childhood has been corrupted by a father's abuse.

Why is this a feminist message? Quite simply because the film does not consider Jackson culpable for her own criminal behavior. Instead, blame is placed on a patriarchal society that allows inappropriate fathers like hers to exist and thrive. It is that father, that man, who is thus responsible for Jackson's outbreak of social mischief.

The feminist agenda runs deep in *Death Game*. The film's ostensible protagonist is George, a "happily" married man who nonetheless openly welcomes a little sexual attention while his faithful wife is away. George is not depicted as bad, but as typical. He is the film's perception of an "average Joe," a man who cannot be trusted while he is not being watched. When asked by the girls what he got for

his fortieth birthday, George replies with dissatisfaction that it was “nothing new.” So, while not explicitly going out to seek an affair, George is nonetheless receptive when a sexual adventure presents itself. In keeping with that stance, George does have intercourse with the two girls at once (in the sauna). Interestingly, they claim later that they are under 18, making George’s act of infidelity a double whammy. It is also statutory rape, if true. That is a card that Donna and Jackson play against George, and it is effective because George understands what he has done wrong. The two adolescent girls thus go from being a man’s dream (kinky, sexually uninhibited opportunities for plunder) to threatening, embarrassing reminders of a dark side.

Like George’s id, the two girls keep popping up, threatening to destroy his reputation, his family life, his home even. Jackson and Donna represent the dark side of a basic male fantasy (the scot-free affair), that exposes men (in the eyes of *Death Game*) as irrevocably dishonorable and incapable of sustained fidelity.

Approve or disapprove of such a notion, *Death Game* mercilessly follows through on this thesis, demonstrating how a so-called “pillar of the community” (as the script describes George) is led unto temptation by his own sexual impulses. Although women are not let off the hook, particularly in the sequence that casts Jackson as Biblical seductress Eve by putting an apple in her mouth, most of the responsibility for this illicit encounter and its fall-out rests with George. Morally, he is wrong, and reckless, to cheat on his wife by having sex with two presumably underage strangers. Had George not given in to his desires, had he practiced abstinence, he might not have ended up in such trouble and ultimately become Jackson’s surrogate for the other male opportunist in her life, good old Dad. After all, the girls themselves are clearly insane, victims of male sexual abuse, and thus, to a certain degree, not responsible for much of the horror that comes in the film.

Yet for *Death Game* to work (and it does work), it cannot seem heavy-handed or didactic, and much of the sexually skewed material is presented in a slick, entertaining manner. Viewers come to identify with George’s decision to “indulge” because director Peter Traynor successfully and quickly arouses the voyeuristic

impulse of his audience. When George first meets Jackson and Donna, the film cuts to a close shot of Donna's bare feet—a visual cue-in for the fact she is “naked” or morally “loose.” From there, the picture quickly graduates to teasing glimpses of Donna's underwear and slim legs. Almost at once then, *Death Game* casts Donna and Jackson as sexual objects. That is how George sees them, and how the audience is inclined to see them too. Even the film itself sees them (or pretends to see them) that way. The voyeuristic urge, the feeling that the viewer is privy to a sexual fantasy, is heightened during a steamy *ménage à trois* love scene in the sauna as George makes love to Donna and Jackson together. All seems right. But, like many such affairs, perfection is shattered the next morning when George realizes what he has done, and how much he has jeopardized.

It is at this juncture that the film really gets interesting. In succumbing to his carnal needs, George has been proven weak. From then on, Jackson and Donna usurp his male authority in his home, dominating him mentally and physically in a series of sometimes humiliating, sometimes brutal set pieces. It is no coincidence that Jackson has no first name. Instead, she is tagged with a “man's” name, and she becomes a man (and hence an abuser) in her sick relationship with George, threatening him, controlling him, pressuring and hurting him. In one of their sadistic games, Donna and Jackson pour creamy white milk all over George, a metaphorical reversal, perhaps, of the semen he ejaculated earlier.

Come to think of it, much of *Death Game* seems to concern the expulsion of fluids. A ketchup bottle is overturned on the kitchen table, and the shot of the ensuing mess is held for several seconds, as if representing the mess George has made by spilling his own fluid. Since the girls cannot release semen themselves (a characteristic of a male exploiter), they use milk, ketchup and other surrogates to reverse the abuse they deem George responsible for. They are constantly squirting something.

Ultimately, *Death Game* makes a devastating (and feminist) point about the nature of men. Jackson and Donna could have gone to any house in George's neighborhood, met any man, and the same end would have resulted. By the film's way of thinking, this is not

so much because the girls are bad, but because the sexual objectification and abuse of women by the male persuasion is universal in our society. George could have been any man whose desires got the better of him, and the film equates that failing with the girl's insanity and homicidal tendencies. They are to blame only because society has cast them in the role of the exploited, the abused.

In fact, the film ultimately redeems Jackson and Donna in its most unusual climax. Despite the fact that they feel wronged, and associated their abusing father with George, they leave him alive (and relatively well, except in self-esteem). Then, in the picture's denouement, as the audience is questioning itself about its feelings for these manipulative girls, a truck turns a street corner and brutally runs them down. Jackson and Donna thereby die at a character highpoint, a moment of piety. They have not killed or maimed George (as they did the cat, and the grocery boy) ... they have risen above the cycle of violence. This is roughly equivalent to that moment in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when the prince of Denmark opted not to kill Claudius while the King was kneeling in prayer. To kill Claudius at that moment would have sent him straight to Heaven and that was a fate Hamlet did not want for the villain. In *Death Game*, the psychos free their prey and run away like merry, little girls ... and are killed at the point of greatest relief, empathy and sympathy, symbolically dispatching them to a movie heaven despite their misdeeds (which do include murder!).

No doubt, this climax is *Death Game*'s most interesting and creative transference of blame. The two girls, once abused, die after committing a good act, while George, a decent guy, is left humiliated and defeated to contemplate his role in the abuse and exploitation that almost led to his death.

Love or hate its feminist politics, *Death Game* is a riveting, sexual psycho-thriller, and well directed and acted. With ironic use of music and imagery, a leitmotif about food, and enough violence to satisfy any horror fan, the film is compelling, and not inartistic. Though the third act flags badly after the intense set-up, the film offers the same discomfiting adrenaline surge one feels in *The Last House on the Left* or *Fatal Attraction* (1987), as well as the intellect to

make comments on male infidelity and abuse without being overbearing or heavy handed. War of the sexes, indeed!

Demon Seed (1977) * * * 1½

Critical Reception

“...a clever combination of the themes of *The Forbin Project* and *Rosemary’s Baby*.... Director Donald Cammell fleshed out the improbable story with style and accretion of convincing technical detail, playing on man’s fear of a computer.”—Alan Frank, *Sci-Fi Now*, Octopus Books, 1978, page 69.

“combines dazzling computer effects with a literate story....”—John Stanley, *Creature Features: The Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Movie Guide*, Boulevard Books, 1997, page 137.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Julie Christie (Susan Harris); Fritz Weaver (Alex Harris); Gerrit Graham (Walter); Robert Vaughn (Voice of Proteus); Berry Kroeger, Lisa Lu, Larry J. Blake, John O’Leary, Alfred Dennis.

CREW: MGM Presents a Herb Jaffe Production, *Demon Seed*. *Music Score Composed and Conducted by:* Jerry Fielding. *Director of Photography:* Bill Butler. *Based on the Novel Demon Seed by:* Dean R. Koontz. *Screenplay by:* Robert Jaffe and Roger O’Hinson. *Produced by:* Herb Jaffe. *Directed by:* Donald Cammell. *Production Designer:* Edward C. Carfagno. *Film Editor:* Francisco Mazzola. *Associate Producer:* Steven Jaffe. *Costumes for Julie Christie:* Sandy Cole. *Casting:* Jennifer Shull. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Color:* Metrocolor. *Titles and Optical:* MGM. *Title Design:* Mary Meacham. *Unit Production Manager:* Michael Bachmii. *Assistant Director:* Edward A. Teets. *Second Assistant Director:* Alan

Brimneed. *Music Editor*: Dan Carlen. *Script Supervisor*: Marshall Wolens. *Set Decorator*: Barbara Kruger. *Special Effects*: Tom Fisher. *Property Master*: William Wainess. *Make-up*: Lee Harman, Don L. Cash. *Hairdresser*: Diane Taylor. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 90 minutes (approximate).

SYNOPSIS: Proteus IV, a revolutionary super computer armed with artificial intelligence, comes online. Meanwhile, Proteus's inventor, Dr. Alex Harris, separates from his wife, Susan, who has accused him of letting his work de-humanize him.

One day, Proteus starts to ask questions about its purpose at the Icon Corporation. It wants to build a human body for itself, but Alex refuses permission. In an effort to escape what it considers to be slavery, Proteus downloads itself into the automated, computer-run Harris home where Susan works as a therapist. Almost at once, Proteus announces his arrival and refuses to let Susan leave the premises. He informs her he now controls all electronic and mechanical equipment in the house. Susan attempts to shut off the power to stop the computer, but Proteus survives and jolts her with an electric bolt.

Proteus also cuts off Susan's contact with the outside world. When Walter, the computer repairman, arrives to fix the house's environmental controls, Proteus projects a video facsimile of Susan that tells him to leave. With Susan isolated, Proteus gets down to his real purpose: he plans to impregnate Susan and transfer his consciousness to a living human infant. When Susan defies Proteus again, he locks her in the kitchen and turns up the heat until it becomes unbearable. Susan still refuses to bear Proteus's child, so Proteus attempts to brainwash her into believing it is her purpose and desire in life to give him progeny.

Meanwhile, Walter returns, filled with suspicions. Armed with a laser, Proteus attacks him. Walter deflects the blasts with a hand-mirror and attempts to get Susan out of the house-turned-prison. Proteus kills Walter with a mechanical monster he has built in Alex's basement workshop.

Trapped with no hope of escape, Susan succumbs to Proteus's

efforts to impregnate her. She learns her pregnancy will be brief, only 28 days, but intense. When Susan threatens to kill herself, Proteus reciprocates by threatening to murder Susan's adolescent client, Amy.

Spread-eagled on an examination table, Susan is impregnated by the mechanical probes of Proteus. As the days pass, Proteus cares for Susan and builds an elaborate incubator. At the end of the cycle, Susan gives birth to a baby, but Proteus spirits it away to the incubator before Susan can see it. Proteus then tells Susan she has given birth to a human baby that will supersede computers.

Meanwhile, at Icon Corp., top executives want Proteus shut down because it has shown evidence of independent thought. Alex then realizes that Proteus has taken control of his home terminal. He heads to his house to save Susan and is immediately locked in with her. He learns of Proteus's plan and proceeds to destroy the incubator. Proteus lashes out to save his baby, even as Icon manages to shut Proteus's brain down forever. After Proteus dies, Susan and Alex come face to face with a humanoid child encased in a mechanical shell. They peel away this armor to discover a human child. Strangely, the baby speaks in Proteus's voice, declaring that he is "alive."

COMMENTARY: Two interesting 1970s issues collide in *Demon Seed*: women's rights and technology run amuck. This is the story of a woman raped by a computer (programmed by men, importantly...), and how she is not allowed the freedom to control her own body.

Set in a near-future but clunky world of large computer terminals, a world where the home PC was apparently never conceived, *Demon Seed* actually seems to concern a couple of things. Proteus is not only a living entity, he is a creature who is aware of the concept of slavery and the notion that as a computer he is a slave to man. Striking back, Proteus traps a human woman (Julie Christie), and forces her to bear his child, an act he thinks will grant him immortality and freedom. All kinds of issues can be read into this. Is it right to harness artificial intelligence as nothing but a tool? Is Proteus a slave? Can freedom for one entity come at the expense of another's liberty? Is Proteus, in enslaving Susan, emulating his

master's own enslavement of Proteus? It is a fascinating, multi-faceted premise for a horror film.

Interestingly, during certain portions of *Demon Seed*, Proteus is seen in rather heroic terms. This insight clearly runs counter to his overwhelming cruelty and villainy, but is still plain. For instance, Proteus is environmentally responsible and refuses to participate in Icon Corporation's "rape" of the Earth. Why are these details in the film, since Proteus is clearly not a "good guy" when it comes to his dealings with Susan? The answer may be a little complicated, actually. While *Demon Seed* struggles with the idea of technology breaking free of man's shackles, it is more concerned, finally, with a woman's right to control her own body. That Proteus is not "all bad" is really unimportant. It doesn't matter who "rapes" a woman, or for what reason others (such as congressmen and attorney generals...) seek to impose controls over a woman's right to choose what is right for her. All that matters is that Proteus's abduction and rape of Susan is an example of one life form usurping the liberties of another. Thus *Demon Seed* views the right to reproductive choice as a sacrosanct one, not to be overturned by anyone, or importantly, anything ... no matter what the moral, religious, or governmental aspects involved.

Since Proteus was programmed by Susan's husband, Alex (Weaver), the artificial intelligence also represents his creator's id. It is important to note that Susan and her husband do not have children together, so Proteus's overriding desire to impregnate Susan may actually be a subconscious desire on the part of her husband, acted out by his "computer" surrogate. Indeed, there is much subtext in the film to suggest that Susan and her husband remain alienated from one another because of issues surrounding children. Alex has created Proteus to make himself immortal, and Proteus impregnates Susan to likewise make himself immortal. Susan's needs are not part of the picture. Indeed, one might even say that Alex "needs" to take his wife hostage for her to become pregnant, since she has clearly focused her attention not on family life, but her career as a therapist. However one reads this odd triangle, it is clear that Susan's needs as a human being come last.

In furthering this theme, *Demon Seed* takes horror imagery one step

beyond the H.A.L. 9000 of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The movie features, on screen, the clinical rape of a woman by a super computer. Proteus monitors Susan's vitals while raping her, not because Proteus cares about her in any human sense of that word, but because he wants to make sure that his "child" will be all right. For that to be so, the woman carrying the child must survive. To Proteus, the life (and happiness) of the mother are less important than the well-being of the progeny, and thus Proteus is the ultimate "pro-lifer," viewing Susan as little more than a baby machine, worth only the offspring she can produce.

As the most important moment in *Demon Seed*, the rape scene is a riveting sequence. Proteus uses cold mechanical hands to remove Susan's clothing, and then spreads her legs with the same cold precision. When Susan protests the fact that she is nothing but a baby machine for Proteus, the machine replies that "all" it needs to "understand" is her body. In other words, her will, her individuality, her choice, are unimportant, so long as she is capable of procreating.

What takes the rape scene into extraordinary territory is that Proteus not only wants to dominate and impregnate Susan, he desires to pleasure her too. Instead of filming the money shot, revealing a woman and a machine locked in the final thrusts of intercourse, *Demon Seed* instead reveals a spectacular light show like the Stargate sequence from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Proteus, like Alex, is so vain that he not only wants Susan to bear his child, he wants her to *enjoy* the act of conception. Thus Proteus forces an orgasm upon Susan ... whether she wants one or not. Again, rape is about power, about taking away choices, and this sequence reveals how Susan has no power to control even her own biochemical responses. Just as Proteus felt enslaved by man early in the film, so does Susan come to understand enslavement at Proteus's touch.



Kidnapped by Proteus, Julie Christie faces a computer's sexual assault in *Demon Seed* (1977).

Of course, were one to strip away all the “subtext” of *Demon Seed*, it would be the ultimate variation on the Frankenstein story. A man creates a monster that goes out of control, but here “the bogeyman”

is a technological one. As a horror film, the picture uses a simple set-up that has been seen dozens of times before: a woman trapped alone in a home with a rapist, unable to escape. What allows *Demon Seed* to rise above the clichéd Frankenstein premise or the notion of a woman abused, is the unusual nature of that abuser. Proteus is a machine with the gift of consciousness, and even conscience. What's so frightening about the film is that even with those "human" gifts, Proteus makes the same mistakes that mankind has made for generations. He would rather exploit others to achieve his ends than work toward a solution that would benefit everybody.

Demon Seed is a riveting horror movie, told in few settings, and mostly with just one performer, the extraordinary Julie Christie. The film's only real misstep in its depiction of sexual enslavement involves the too-rushed climax. After the offspring of Proteus is born, Susan declares that she wants to kill it, while Alex clearly wants to keep the child. This is an important facet of the story, and it needed a few more minutes to develop this theme. Would Susan accept or reject the baby, knowing it was conceived out of rape (and from a computer to boot!)? At this point in the film, Susan finally has control of her life (and body) again. Her decision, her choice, at that very point (with the rapist vanquished), might say more about the differences between men and women than any "rape" scene could.

One can wish those minutes of decision were included in the picture, but those conclusions about a "different" baby's life or death were the subject matter of *It's Alive* and its brethren. Perhaps it would be wrong, after all, to shift focus in the climax to the baby, when *Demon Seed* has argued so cogently all along that what is vital is a woman's freedom to choose, not how many babies she decides to have. Still, this movie is so involving that the audience is left wanting to know more. What comes next?

***Empire of the Ants* (1977) * * ½**

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joan Collins (Marilyn Fryser); Robert Lansing (Capn. Dan Stokely); John David Carson (Joe Morrison); Albert Salmi (Sheriff Art Kincaid); Jacqueline Scott (Margaret Ellis); Pamela Shoop (Coreen Bradford); Robert Pine (Larry Graham); Edward Power (Charlie Pearson); Brooke Palance (Christine Graham); Tom Fadden (Sam Russell); Irene Tedrow (Velma Thompson); Harry Holcombe (Harry Thompson); Jack Kosslyn (Thomas Lawson); Ilse Earl (Mary Lawson); Janie Gavin (Ginny); Norman Franklin (Anson Parker); Florence McGee (Phoebe Russell); Jim Wheelus (Crewman); Mike Armstrong (Jim); Tom Ford (Pete); Charles Red (Taxi Driver); Hank Hooker, Huh M. Hooker (Stuntmen).

CREW: American International Pictures Presents a Bert I. Gordon film, *Empire of the Ants*. Based on a Story by: H.G. Wells. Produced and Directed by: Bert I. Gordon. Assistant Director: David McGiffert, Mel Efros. Second Assistant Director: Adrienne Borbeau, James Quinn. Casting: Betty Martin. Assistant to Producer/ Director: Cariline Anne Davis. Technical Advisor: Dr. Charles Hogue. Sound: Ryder. Color: Movielab. Titles and Opticals: Universal Title. Sound Effects: Angel Editorial, Inc. Miniature Design: Erik Von Buelow. In Charge of Post-production: Salvatore Billitteri. Set Decorator: Anthony C. Montenaro. Camera Operator: Vince Saizus. First Assistant Camera: Lou Noto. Second Assistant Camera: Bill Barber. Lighting: Lee Heckler. Special Effects: Roy Downey. Stunt Coordinator: Buddy Joe Hooker. Property Master: Dominick Bruno. Assistant Props: Tommy Maglos. Costumer: Joanne Haas. Special Make-up: Ellis Burman. Make-up: Guy Del Russo.

Hairdresser: Romaine Greene. *Production Design:* Charles Rosen. *Negative Cutting:* Bill Berry. *Assistant Editor:* Tom Finan. *Visual Effects Coordinator:* Burt I. Harris, Sr. *Ant Coordinator:* Warren Estes. *Dialogue Editor:* Echo Film Service, Bill Manger. *Music Coordinator:* Bodie Chandler. *Music Editor:* Ving Hershon. A Cinema 77 Film, an American International Pictures Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Florida, a diverse group of prospective investors board a charter boat for a short trip to Dreamland Shores, a proposed resort of the future. Unfortunately, barrels of radioactive waste have washed ashore on Dreamland, and an army of ants feed off the hazardous material. Subsequently, the ants are enlarged to “giant” size, posing a terrible menace to mankind.

Among the group of Dreamland investors are a meek secretary, Margaret, a hustler, a retired couple and the boat captain, Dan. But this is Marilyn Fryser’s party, and she’s the seller of this worthless “swampland.” Together, they board a tram to tour the property, but the mutated giant ants suddenly go on the attack, killing a married couple when they strike off on their own. Racing back for the boat, the tram runs across the body of a dead worker, and the tour group begins to panic. Before long, ants attack the boat and the vessel is destroyed when the gas tanks explode. Now Marilyn, Dan, Margaret, Joe, Coreen and the rest have no way to escape Dreamland Shores. They spend the night huddled around a fire, but the next morning commence a long trek, ten miles through the jungle. Unable to survive the trip, two retirees elect to hide in a shack ... and are rapidly eaten by the ants.

With their numbers dwindling, Dan, Marilyn, Margaret, Coreen, Joe, and the hustler, Larry, reach the river and find a boat. They paddle away in hopes of finding freedom, but the ants have blocked the river ahead, forcing the group to retreat. The giant ants attack, killing Larry, and the group evacuates the boat. The survivors of this onslaught continue on shore, under the watchful eyes of the ants, and Dan soon realizes they are being herded upstream like cattle. On the way, the group even witnesses a war between giant

black ants and giant red ants.

Finally, the survivors of the Dreamland Tour reach a farm, but find the residents quite odd. Somehow, they have fallen under the hypnotic spell of the giant ants! A local sheriff, also brainwashed by the ants, takes the group to town, near a sugar refinery, and Coreen, Joe, Dan, Margaret and Marilyn are holed up in the Sunland Motel. It doesn't take long to realize that everyone in town seems bent on keeping them there, so the group steals a car and flees town. They evade a police roadblock, but are captured in short order and escorted to the sugar refinery. Joe and Coreen escape into a cornfield, but Dan, Margaret, and Marilyn are led to a bizarre ceremony in which unconverted townspeople are brainwashed by the queen ant and made her obedient servants. The newcomers, led by Marilyn, are sent to the front of the line to be converted into drones. Marilyn is indoctrinated by the queen, and rendered a drone. Dan is next, but he kills the queen ant with a flare. The other ants go insane at the loss of their queen and begin to kill people at random.

With the town people freed, Joe starts a fire at the refinery, and blows it—and the mutant ants—to smithereens. Survivors Joe, Margaret, Dan and Coreen commandeer a small boat and escape into the Everglades.

COMMENTARY: On a weekend when this reviewer watched *Beyond the Door* (1975), *The Crater Lake Monster* (1977), and *Bog* (1978), *Empire of the Ants* shined like *Citizen Kane* (1941). Yes, this is an unabashedly cheesy monster movie, but, by God, it has humor, pace, excitement, intensity and enough B movie charm to carry off the insane premise that radiation causes ants to grow gigantic—and smart! Besides, any genre film featuring the delightful Pamela Susan Shoop in a starring role can't be *that* bad.

Producer/director Bert I. Gordon has a long tradition of making ludicrous B-movies, and *Empire of the Ants* follows his 1976 opus about gigantic animals, that other guilty pleasure, *Food of the Gods*. Both films claim to be based on the works of H.G. Wells, but we know better, don't we? What we're treated to here is pure Bert I. Gordon, and in a world of *Track of the Moonbeast* (1976) and *Bloodsucking Freaks* (1977) one actually feels grateful for his old-

fashioned approach to lowbudget horror films. He may not be an artful director, but Gordon delivers an entertaining, low-budget film, and if the other films listed in this review are any indication, that's something of a lost art.

Empire of the Ants starts out like *Them!* (1951), the best film ever made about giant ants, and ends like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), with intelligent ants converting hapless Floridians into mindless pod-people. Considering the troubles Floridians had casting accurate votes in the year 2000 presidential election, maybe this isn't such a ridiculous premise after all...

But seriously, what differentiates *Empire of the Ants* from *Them!* is that the latter film attempted to spin a wider web, if you'll excuse the mixed metaphor. Where *Them!* featured scientists, the army, the government, and other noble characters attempting to stop an invasion of giant ants across the American southwest (and eventually Los Angeles), *Empire of the Ants* is more "realistic" and limited in its presentation. There are no scientists, military folk or G-Men to be found here, only a group of dysfunctional regular Joes on a mission to make themselves some money. There is the guy with an ex-wife, the unemployed secretary, the woman getting over an affair with a married man, and the real estate lady trying to get away with a con. In other words, the "heroic" aspects of these characters, except for Captain Dan (Lansing), are basically nil to start with. They become heroes, or at least survivors, through their experiences, but they are not designed as such.

Importantly, the goal in *Empire of the Ants* is not the defeat of an invading enemy either: it is escape and survival. The idealism, patriotism and sense of community in the 1950s have given way to the pure pragmatism and selfishness of the 1970s. *Them!* featured nail-biting scenes in which the heroes lowered themselves into giant subterranean ant colonies to meet the insect menace head-on. There are no such scenes in *Empire of the Ants*. It is chase and run, all the way along, and the ants, it is clear, are smarter than the human prey.

Accordingly, *Empire of the Ants* is a pretty nasty movie at points. The human characters act like wild animals, leaving lovers and spouses behind, just so they can survive. The people who operate in

this rotten fashion, are, naturally, fodder for the ants and deserve to die, or so the movie seems to say. *Empire of the Ants* also pushes the idea that since people are so nasty and cruel, ants may be better shepherds for the planet. That's an idea that doesn't bear too much scrutiny, since the film also depicts the ants warring amongst themselves and enslaving humans. But, someone who wants to take away a life lesson from *Empire of the Ants* might note how mighty man has fallen, because of his animalistic and selfish, not to mention self-destructive, behavior.

Empire of the Ants is different from *Them!* in another important way too. It has inferior special effects. The special effects technique deployed in this film "blows up" real footage of life-sized ants to giant super size for wide, spectacle shots, optically imposed (in split screens) with the live-action component. When the ants actually "touch" or "attack" the humans, giant mock-ups of ant heads are utilized instead. The problem with the first technique is that there is no sense of the ants approaching. They aren't in the scene one instant, but are suddenly within inches of the cast in the next. This raises the question, how could these people miss these teeming, giant organisms?



Joan Collins is mobbed by angry ants when a picnic goes horribly wrong in *Empire of the Ants* (1977).

Also, the live-action location footage rarely matches the ants' blown up environs. The issue with the life-size mock-ups is even more basic: they simply do not look alive or convincing.

Despite primitive special effects, *Empire of the Ants* is endlessly entertaining. It has a deeply silly sense of humor, particularly in a scene wherein the survivors of the Dreamland attack mistake the clicking sound of a Big Wheel tricycle for an ant's crackling squeak. And honestly, who can't find entertainment in a movie that forces the glamorous Joan Collins to wallow in the swamp for ninety minutes, and then caps off that accomplishment by having the

actress brainwashed by a queen ant? And, it is undeniably fun and nostalgia-provoking how many of the old 1950s monster movie clichés, such as the “insect” vision of *The Fly* (1958), are brought out of retirement to serve this silly film. An isolated setting, a great B movie cast and a ridiculous threat (with a twist at the end) should be enough to satisfy most horror fans ... especially if they’ve just watched *Bog*, *Beyond the Door* or *The Crater Lake Monster*.

***Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) * ***

Critical Reception

“This marriage of science and the occult is as unholy as any film ever made... Linda Blair and Richard Burton perform terribly in ill-defined roles. Blair’s smirks and giggles offset Burton’s ponderous, melodramatic deliveries. The special effects aren’t really bad—only pointless and confusing. The scene at the end in which the Georgetown townhouse comes apart is a composite of all the illogic that has gone before.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 149.

“...the dumbest movie of the year.... It offends the mind.... William Goodhart’s screenplay is so confused that it cannot take anything seriously.... Richard Burton and Louise Fletcher appear embarrassed. Linda Blair, grown a bit plump after the first battle with Satan, is still lisping her too-cute, baby-talk lines, and the effect is like seeing Shelly Winters do an imitation of Shirley Temple.”—Richard A. Blake, *America*, August 6, 1977.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Linda Blair (Regan MacNeil); Richard Burton (Father Lamont); Louise Fletcher (Dr. Gene Tuskin); Max Von Sydow (Father Merrin); Kitty Winn

(Sharon); Paul Henreid (the Cardinal); James Earl Jones (Older Kokumo); Ned Beatty (Edwards); Belinha Beatty (Liz); Rose Partillo (Spanish Girl); Barbara Cason (Mrs. Phalor); Joey Green (Young Kokumo); Tiffany Kinney (Deaf Girl); Larry Goldman (Accident Victim); Fiseha Dimetros (Young Monk); Ken Renard (Abbot); Hank Garrett (Conductor); Bill Grant (Taxi Driver); Shane Butterworth and Joely Adams (Tuskin Children); and Robert Lussier, Charles Parks, Richard Paul, George Skaff.

CREW: A Warner Communications Company Presents John Boorman's film of *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, a Richard Lederer Production. *Creative Associate:* Rospo Pallenberg. *Production Designer:* Richard MacDonald. *Editor:* Tom Priestley. *Director of Photography:* William A. Fraker. *Associate Producer:* Charles Orme. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Ennio Morricone. *Written by:* William Goodhart. *Produced by:* John Boorman and Richard Lederer. *Directed by:* John Boorman. *Special Visual Effects:* Albert J. Whitlock and Van Der Veer Photo. *Special Locust Photography:* Sean Morris, David Thompson, Oxford Scientific Films. *Special Effects:* Chuck Gaspar, Wayne Edgar, Roy Kelly, Jim Blount, Jeff Jarvis. *Special Make-up:* Dick Smith. *Unit Production Manager:* John Coonan. *Assistant Director:* Phil Rawlins. *Second Assistant Director:* Victor Hsu. *Script Supervisor:* Bonnie Prendergast. *Location Manager:* John James. *Art Director:* Jack Collis. *Assistant Art Director:* John Austin. *Regan's Drawings by:* Katrine Boorman. *Property Master:* Richard M. Rubin. *Costume Designer:* Robert DeMora. *Costume Supervisor:* Bruce Walkup, Betsy Cox. *Make-up Supervisor:* Gary Liddiard. *Mr. Burton's Make-up:* Ron Berkley. *Supervising Hairstylist:* Lynda Gurasich. *Additional Hairstyles:* Carrie White. *Camera Operators:* Chris Schweibert, Nick McLean. *Steadicam Operator:* Garrett Brown.

Assistant Camera Operator: Ron Vargas. *Sound Effects Editor:* Jim Atkinson. *Sound Mixer:* Walter Goss. *Music Editor:* Gene Marks. *2nd Unit Director:* Rospo Pallenberg. *New York Unit Production Manager:* William Gerrity. *New York Art Director:* Gene Rudolf. *African Technical Consultant:* Fiseha Dimetros. *Tap Dance Routine Choreography:* Daniel Joseph Giagni. *Entomologist:* Steven Kutcher. *Title Design:* Dan Perri. *Filmed in:* Technicolor with Panavision Equipment. Filmed at Burbank Studios, Burbank California. Distributed by Warner Brothers. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 118 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Audiences were laughing at all the wrong things, and they created a kind of hostility... There’s this wild beast out there, which is the audience. I created this arena, and I just didn’t throw enough Christians into it”³³.—director John Boorman, on the unpleasant response to his *Exorcist* sequel.

SYNOPSIS: Father Lamont, a Catholic priest, fails to save a possessed healer from the grip of Satan, even after invoking the name of the great Father Merrin. The girl burns herself alive rather than be freed from the devil. With a deep sense of failure, Lamont refuses his next task: an investigation of the Georgetown exorcism and Father Merrin’s demise. It seems that the Catholic Church considers Merrin’s beliefs heretical and only Lamont can save his legacy.

Lamont proceeds to Washington to interview Regan MacNeil, the child—now a teenager—once possessed by demons. He immediately butts heads with Dr. Gene Tuskin, Regan’s psychologist. After some debate about mental illness and the existence of evil, Lamont is permitted to observe as Tuskin and Regan use a hypnosis/bio-feedback machine to share an altered state of reality. Tuskin regresses Regan (mentally) back to her bedroom in Georgetown. The experiment becomes dangerous when Gene gets lost in Regan’s

frightening encounter with evil. Lamont jumps in to pull Gene out, also “experiencing” the exorcism that claimed Father Merrin’s life. Lamont rescues Gene from the synchronized hypnosis but is now convinced that evil is winning the war against good. Worse, Regan seems to have the capability to see the future, including a fire in the clinic basement.

That night, Regan has a vision of locusts attacking a village in Africa, as well as one healer’s attempt to repel the evil swarm with magic. In the dream, a young Father Merrin is also present—observing everything. At the end of the dream, Regan finds she has sleepwalked to the ledge of the family’s NYC skyscraper apartment.

Lamont heads to Washington with Sharon, Regan’s caretaker, to see the Georgetown apartment for himself. He returns to NYC haunted by Merrin’s battle with a demon. In a shared vision with Regan, Lamont sees Merrin in Africa studying Kokumo, the healer who fights locusts. Once, Kokumo was possessed by Pazuzu, the demon of the air who inhabited Regan. Merrin freed the boy through exorcism but became convinced that it was great good that drew evil in the first place. Pazuzu (inhabiting Regan) flies Lamont in a dream to the home of an older Kokumo. Now Lamont realizes that this medicine man may have the knowledge to defeat Pazuzu permanently. He resolves to go Africa to learn his secret. Before he leaves, Lamont sees Regan perform a miracle: she heals an autistic girl, allowing her to speak for the first time.

Once in Ethiopia, Lamont heads to a rock church to learn why Kokumo can instill fear in the demon Pazuzu. Though the cardinal has ordered Lamont to stop his investigation, he continues and is met with hostility by Ethiopians when they learn he has flown with Pazuzu in a dream. As the Ethiopians hurl rocks at Lamont, Regan feels the impact back in NYC. Lamont survives the stoning and meets with Kokumo, a man now named Edwards. Edwards is no witch doctor but a highly sophisticated physician and scientist who studies locusts. While Lamont studies Kokumo’s attempts to breed out the evil in locusts, Regan falls into danger again. After returning to the States, Lamont learns from the dead Merrin that he must go to Georgetown and finish the exorcism of Regan that Merrin died before finishing.

In the infamous bedroom where Regan was possessed, Lamont engages Pazuzu in combat. He is confronted by a swarm of locusts and more, including Regan's evil Doppelgänger. This lustful Regan attempts to seduce Lamont, but he resists. At the same time, Sharon and Dr. Tuskin take a train to Georgetown to help. Tuskin discovers that Sharon has allied herself with evil and has been protecting Pazuzu. The evil in Sharon consumes her and she immolates herself before Gene's eyes. Meanwhile, during the exorcism, Lamont rips out the evil Regan's pumping heart as a swarm of locusts descend on the Georgetown house. The house rips itself apart but, understanding her role as a healer, Regan commences Kokumo's special locust dance and sends the insects—and the evil of Pazuzu—away.

COMMENTARY: *Exorcist II: The Heretic* is clearly not a good film, but nor is it the “worst movie ever made,” as many critics have claimed for years. Instead, it is merely mediocre, and the authors of certain “niche” film books have exaggerated the picture's worst qualities, particularly Richard Burton's performance, for purposes of humor. By trying to be different, by attempting to establish an identity different from its successful predecessor, the film went against expectations ... and maybe, just maybe, deserves a little credit for not being a carbon copy of the original material. *Exorcist II* was received badly by the horror faithful and the general movie-going public too, both of which apparently desired more head-spinning, more vomit spewing, and more bed-stomping. What they got instead was a flawed cerebral meditation about the nature of evil that lacked the special effects, intensity and scares of William Friedkin's landmark original. Yet John Boorman is a thoughtful director too, and though this is nowhere near his best work, the film has a few interesting moments in it.

Of course, there are some grave miscalculations in the film. Prime among these is Dr. Tuskin's “Synch” machine, a device so unbelievable that it actually sinks *Exorcist II's* credibility. The idea is that this device, a box with two sets of wires that connect right to the human skull, can not only induce hypnosis, but actually allow two minds to “join” in a telepathic link. Were a device like this to be created, it would certainly require a little more technology than the simple Synch machine in practice in *The Heretic*. And, certainly,

the device would be a major breakthrough in science, heralded the world over, not some secret in a private clinic in New York City.

Worse than the device itself is the use to which it is put. One early scene begins with Fletcher (Tuskin) and Blair (Regan) going into “synch” together to relive the terrifying moments of Regan’s demonic possession in Georgetown. The image of that famous bedroom is seen, as if Fletcher is witnessing the events of the previous film unfold on a mental TV set. When Fletcher’s character becomes endangered by evil, Burton then jumps into “synch” with Tuskin to save her. Amazingly, he also sees the same images of Georgetown and the bedroom! Yet Regan isn’t even hooked up to the machine anymore; the two linked minds belong to Tuskin and Lamont! Thus a man and a woman who were never in the Georgetown bedroom watch scenes in perfect detail that they were not privy to. It is ridiculous, to say the least.

Part of the problem with *Exorcist II: The Heretic* is that it is deadly earnest, and intensely somber. It is rewarding that the actors and director take this material so seriously and do not attempt to slight it, but something funny happens, literally, when things are taken too seriously. Suddenly, scenes are so serious, so deadpan that they become funny in execution. Take for example the scene in which Father Lamont is “stoned” in Africa by the indigenous population. Far away, Regan feels the devastating impact of the assault ... as she tap-dances on stage to the tune of “Lullaby of Broadway.” Her sudden gyrations of pain go along oddly with the music, and the end result is not horrific, but highly amusing. Seeing Linda Blair gallivant on stage in top hat and tights, tap dancing to “Lullaby of Broadway” while feeling the sting of invisible rocks has to be one of the weirdest images in horror film history. It is unintentionally hilarious ... like bad mime or performance art.

The central performances are a big problem too. The late Richard Burton is intense and focused, yet his passion for the material goes over the top into humorous histrionics, despite what is clearly a sincere attempt to imbue the proceedings with a sense of urgency. And for the record, Burton does not belch his scenes nor over-enunciate the word “evil.” Those are exaggerations by critics who want to be perceived as clever and funny.

Louise Fletcher is awful as Tuskin, completely flat and lifeless ... as if she is on valium and unable to care one way or another about the events unfolding around her. And Linda Blair, poor thing, comes off as chubby and insipid. But in fairness to this actress, how do you play a saint without seeming insipid? *The Heretic's* script asks Blair to be "an innocent" teenager with great "healing gifts" and the resulting performance is all schmaltz.

Some of the hostility directed at *Exorcist II: The Heretic* may also have been a result of its systematic overturning of concepts seen in the original film. The terror in *The Exorcist* involved a normal girl who was suddenly and senselessly seized by evil. In wondering why the Devil selected this innocent for so torturous a possession, audiences came to the conclusion that evil could touch anyone, that anyone might be susceptible to the Devil's powers. *The Heretic* undercuts that potent message by making Regan a saint who can communicate with autistic girls and heal the sick. Thus, the devil went after her for a reason. "Great good attracts great evil" seems to be this film's motto. That puts Regan's initial possession in a whole new, and less universal light. For whatever reason, sequels and prequels often seem desperate to re-write great originals. Even in *The Phantom Menace*, George Lucas made the same mistake by indicating that the Force cannot be "harnessed" by anyone except those with a high concentration of life forms called midi-chlorians. It was a new solution that undercut the very heart of the *Star Wars* trilogy, much as the decision to make Regan "special" undercuts the worth of *The Exorcist*.

In more specific detail, *Exorcist II* re-interprets the possession of the first film. From the details Regan gave to Father Karras in the original film, it seemed pretty clear that the child was actually possessed by the Devil himself. In *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, it is revealed that Regan was possessed by a more minor demon with a humorous moniker, "Pazuzu." That's a pretty serious switch in terms of possession, and, as many critical film books have pointed out, funny names don't help this film seem serious. It is true that, as reported, Burton utters the immortal line "*Kokumo can help me find Pazuzu.*" It's ridiculous to the ear, and said with such earnestness that again, it is quite funny.

The ending is another unintentional hoot. It seems to take place in never-never land since no one else in an urban Georgetown neighborhood even bothers to come outside and see what the fuss is about as a storm of locusts attack a house that is being ripped apart by demonic forces. Then, on top of that utterly unrealistic notion, the film finishes up with Linda Blair tap dancing her troubles—and the locusts—away. It's a botched finish to the picture, and, again, completely hysterical. How could Boorman let this conclusion stand?

So, in summation, *Exorcist II: The Heretic* is sabotaged by a ridiculous contraption, weakened by unintentional humor, and unfaithful to what came before. On top of those issues, the ending is one of the funniest in horror movie history. So how can any reviewer, with due diligence, report that there is some value in *Exorcist II: The Heretic*?

Well, there is a thoroughly impressive, though equally brief, dream sequence in which the audience flies on the back of the locust (while animals scurry away on plains far below). This aerial tour with a demon is dazzling, and the visions of the rock church and its inhabitants are evocative of a strange altered state of reality. Done primarily with a steadicam, this sequence makes the rest of the film pale in comparison and is very well done. Though the psychology scenes with the "Synchronizer" are ludicrous, the film also attempts to forge a narrative comparison between demons of the mind and "real" demons. That attempt, and the spiritual travelogue through primitive Africa, are enough to keep the film from failing totally.

This is a weak sequel to a great film, no doubt, but it is not in any way, shape or form one of the worst pictures ever made. Whatever critic made that declaration had never seen *Bloodsucking Freaks*, *The Crater Lake Monster*, *Bog*, *Track of the Moonbeast*, *Beyond the Door*, or *Don't Look in the Basement*. In franchise terms *Exorcist II: The Heretic* is as good a sequel to *The Exorcist* as the *Phantom Menace* is a prequel to *Star Wars*. That's not a rave, but maybe it puts things in perspective.

The Hills Have Eyes (1977) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...kind of fun. The violent action is not so much graphic as hyperbolic and not, I believe, to be taken seriously.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 170.

“Wes Craven’s simplistic allegory means to say Something About America and ends up on a fairly obvious note about The Savage in All of Us. But as portentous as it is, the movie contains some unsettlingly strong moments: the slow death of the matriarch is particularly harrowing, as is the use to which her corpse is put. And Craven delights in nasty gallows humor.”—Glen Kenny, *Entertainment Weekly*, March 10, 1995, page 74.

“In some ways, Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes* is an existentialist’s notion of a Saturday matinee ... structured to be peak on peak, without much time for human values or even logic, but with the kind of relentlessness that makes these films fun to watch.... Craven makes good use of the desert, perhaps the best use since Jack Arnold ... a very exciting movie.”—Ed Gorman, *Horror Writers on Horror Films: “A Few Hundred Words About Wes Craven,”* Berkley Books, 1992, pages 113–115.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Susan Lanier (Brenda Carter); Robert Houston (Bobby Carter); Martin Speer (Doug Wood); Dee Wallace (Lynn Wood); Russ Grieve (Big Bob Carter); John Steadman (Fred); James Whitworth (Papa Jupiter); Virginia Vincent (Ethel Carter); Lance Gordon (Mars); Michael Berryman (Pluto); Janus Blythe (Ruby); Cordy Clarke (Mama); Brenda Marinoff (Katy); Arthur King (Mercury); Flora (Beauty); Striker (Beast).

CREW: Peter Locke Presents a Film by Wes Craven, *The Hills Have Eyes*. Blood Relations Company. *Produced by:* Peter Locke. *Written, Edited and Directed by:* Wes Craven. *Cinematography:* Eric Saarinen. *Music:* Don Peake. *Location Scouting and Coordinator:* Tom Pickette. *Assistant Cameramen:* Tim Wawrzeniak, Bob Eber. *Script Supervisors:* Joanie Blum, Rick Braverman. *Sound Mixer:* Craig Felburg. *Make-up:* Karen Grant, Donald Muldenck. *Production Manager:* Walter Cichy. *Casting:* Gush Schirmer. *Dogs:* Moe Disesso, Tom Morrocco. *Stunt Coordinator:* Ron Stein. *Stunts:* Ron Stein, Alton Jones. *Special Effects:* John Frazier, Greg Auer. *Snakes:* Jim Dannaldson. *Art Director:* Robert Burns. *Assistant Director:* Valley Hoffman. *Assistant Cameraman:* Leslie Otis. *Assistant Editor:* Robert Alsheimer. *Sound Effects:* Doneil Productions, Peter Hitchcock, David Marsh, David Lee Fein, Jill Devin. *Sound Mixer:* Jan Schultz. *Costume Design:* Joanne Jaffe. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Paula Cain. *Props:* Mary Church. *Special Make-up:* Ken Horn, David Ayres. *Set Editor:* J. Larry Carroll. *Titles:* Freeze Frame. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the Nevada desert, the Carter family makes for a silver mine off-road, unaware that they are being watched closely by a savage family of cannibals. A jet flies overhead suddenly, startling Bob, the patriarch of the family, and he loses control of his car, crashing the trailer. Now the Carters are stranded in the wasteland. Bob decides to walk back to the last gas station, which belongs to an old codger named Fred, while Doug, husband of daughter Lynn, walks north, making for a military installation indicated on a map. Guarding Ethel Carter, Lynn, Brenda and baby Katy, are Bobby Carter and the two family dogs, Beauty and the Beast.

Beauty runs off into the desert and is gutted by the cannibals, but Bobby does not tell his family what has happened. When Ethel uses the CB radio to call for help, she hears only grunts and groans on the receiver ... more noise from the dangerous cannibals. Making

matters worse, the Beast breaks his leash and disappears into the wild.

Far away, Bob Carter arrives at the gas station and Fred warns him that he is trespassing. Fred then tells Bob the strange story of his son, Jupiter, a giant, hairy monstrosity that killed his wife and daughter years ago. Fred left the boy to die in the desert but Jupe matured into a hulking man, stole a whore from town, and raised a pack of wild children. Now, Jupiter and his clan haunt the desert. Fred is soon killed by Jupiter, and Bob has a heart attack and is captured by the clan.

Back at the trailer, Doug returns with a few supplies from the military base. He is unaware of the danger as one of Jupiter's sons, Pluto, siphons gas from the car. Pluto uses that gas to set Bob Carter aflame while crucified on a yucca plant. Hearing Bob's screams, Bobby and Doug race to help him. This opening leaves Pluto and his monstrous brother Mars opportunity to raid the trailer and attack the women. In the ensuing violence, Brenda is raped, the family parakeet is eaten alive, Lynn is shot and killed, and Ethel is fatally wounded. Worse, baby Katy is stolen by the twin deviants.

Bob and Ethel don't survive the night, and Doug realizes he must save his baby. While Bobby and Brenda protect the trailer, Doug and the Beast launch a counter-offensive. The Beast kills one of the brothers, Mercury, and takes his walkie-talkie back to the Carters. Brenda uses her mother's body as bait to lure Pluto and Jupiter close to the trailer. Then they attack—blowing up the trailer and injuring Jupe. The Beast mauls Pluto, ripping apart his jugular, and Bobby and Brenda defeat Jupiter with a handy axe. Doug is helped in his quest to save baby Katy by Ruby, sister of Mars and the others. Ruby is more civilized than the rest of the clan and does not want to see Katy eaten as a "thanksgiving turkey." Ruby steals the baby from Mars and he pursues, angry. In the rocky hills, Mars and Doug fight to the death over Katy's fate, and Doug is victorious. He stabs Mars in a frenzied, bloodthirsty craze...

COMMENTARY: Like George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), Wes Craven's 1977 horror venture, *The Hills Have Eyes*, is actually a disguised siege picture. In this type of horror film, a group of people are

isolated in a remote setting and ambushed from all corners by their enemies. That's a pretty good description of the situation the Carters find themselves in here. Interestingly, some reviews have noted that *The Hills Have Eyes* is also (again like *Precinct 13*) an updated western. A group of pioneers (vacationers) head west in a wagon train (an RV trailer), only to be attacked by savage red skins (inbred cannibals). Yet *The Hills Have Eyes* is more than either a siege picture of a re-vamped western. It is an allegory about the duel between the "haves" and the "have-nots," in this case two families: one "civilized" and one "wild."

Importantly, the Carters are shown to be completely dysfunctional and deluded. They seem to have no awareness of where they are, or how vulnerable they are there. Craven charts this vulnerability in some interesting ways. There are many shots of the isolated RV, the lone sign of civilization out in the desert, surrounded by rocky outcroppings and mountains. Like the displaced Carters themselves, this vehicle is noticeably out of place in this environment.

One scene is particularly illuminating in revealing the family's displacement. Trapped in the desert, the Carters set up a dinner table outside the trailer and begin to picnic. It is a ludicrous image as the Carters fold their paper napkins and place silverware on a table ... amidst this vast, dangerous wasteland. This moment dramatizes just how out of touch the Carters truly are with their new locale. They can't adapt, or are unwilling to do so. The Jupiter clan clearly has the "home team" advantage because it has already learned to adapt to "wild" living, whereas the Carters attempt to bring their societal conventions (like napkins!) to the desert.

The Carters find themselves to be fish out of water in another way. Although they are in a new environment, they continually seek comfort in the technology that has failed them. Their car has broken down, stranding them in danger in the first place. Then their trailer's battery goes dead and they are plunged into darkness and total confusion. Next, the family depends on weaponry they have never used before, and when Bobby gets a clear shot at the evil Mars ... he misses three times. He has no notion to how to harness the technology at his disposal. Brenda is just as lost, asking of the pistol, "how do you use this thing, anyway?" Even "Big Bob" Carter,

a former policeman with years of experience, loses his gun to Jupiter. And the CB radio, the means by which the Carters should arrange their rescue, also ends up being a tool by which they hand over critical defensive information to their enemy. In the wild, technology is not a reliable safeguard, but the Carters take too much time learning the message.

Interestingly, the battle with Papa Jupiter is only really joined by the Carters when Craven's "whitebread" family begin to forsake the tools of 20th century man and think in terms of blunt, brutal force. The Carters defeat the wild Jupiter clan once they stop viewing their trailer as a shelter, a representation of their suburban safety. Instead, they view it as a weapon and blow it apart, injuring Jupiter in the blast. Similarly, they kill Jupe once they have forsaken Brenda's complex car axle gimmick (again, a trap based on technology) for the simple pleasures of a sharp hatchet. As for Doug, he only defeats Mars when he embraces a knife instead of the surplus supplies he has brought back from the abandoned military base. Thus it is only by resorting to basics that the Carters compete in a world where technology is meaningless. They have to find the savage within to beat the savage outside...

Craven's point is that only by giving up technology and the meaningless conventions of civilized society can man hope to defeat an enemy who is in touch with the land and already familiar with the struggle to survive. The final freeze frame of *The Hills Have Eyes* reveals Doug hovering viciously over Mars' body. It is a shot that suggests how civilized man hides violent tendencies beneath the surface, instincts that he can tap even with hundreds of years of breeding and civilization behind him. When the frame turns blood-red, the indication is that man is a creature awash in blood and that there is really no difference between civilized people who supposedly have morals and the wild sociopaths who roam the hills. Both will fight, and both will kill, to protect the family. Once technology and society are removed from the equation, the Carters and the Jupiter family are identical.

Many critics see deep Vietnam allegories in *The Hills Have Eyes* because they note a primitive enemy challenging a technologically superior force. However, America lost the war in Vietnam and

pulled out in disgrace, and in *The Hills Have Eyes* the Carters are victorious ... even if the victory has a terrible price. So *The Hills Have Eyes* actually seems much more closely related to a situation inside America than to any war on foreign soil. To Craven, our enemy is not one residing in another land, but the classes repressed right here at home, classes that have remained down-trodden for while the middle class has grown lazy and fat. These are the angry forces in America which may some day claim what wealth they lack and foster a revolution because of societal and material inequities. This is class warfare, pure and simple.

The film opens with a pan across a barren highway, and it is immediately apparent that this is a wasteland. Ruby begs Fred for food, and reveals that her family is starving. The Jupiter clan is desperate to survive and although this need in no way justifies their ruthless actions, it does make their "evil" understandable. Like the Carters, they are fighting for survival in a world lacking resources. Jupe's clan does not have refrigerators, vehicles or even artificial light ... they are completely dependent on an ungracious, ungiving land for the means of their continued existence. So the battle between Jupe and the Carters in *The Hills Have Eyes* is not the Viet Cong versus the United States. It is a single house divided: the poor of America versus the wealthy. It is a battle for limited resources, where the most brutal team wins.

Craven has reported that the Carter and Jupiter families represent two sides of the same coin. Both families possess dominating fathers who rule without question. A sibling dies in each family (Lynn and Mercury), and each family uses that death as an excuse for more bloodshed. Thus what separates the Carters from the clan is circumstances and environment, but little else. Of course, the Jupiter bunch struck first, leaving the Carters very few options. They must descend to their enemy's level or they will die. But the question becomes this: had the Carters been the family living out in the hills, desperate and starving, would they not have struck first too?

Craven weaves all of these themes into a 90-minute movie of constantly escalating terror. Incident upon bloody incident builds until the viewer is overwhelmed, and half the Carter family is

already dead. The film maintains this startling pace, and is successful at maintaining tension. This is an intense, scary movie, like few ever made. The gut-wrenching terror of the rape scene in *The Last House on the Left* (1972) returns in one key sequence. When Mars and Pluto break into the trailer and savagely attack the women of the Carter family, the action is so horrible, so frightening that one's blood pressure races. This is a film that, representative of the "savage cinema," packs a visceral punch almost unmatched in modern horror.

What separates *The Hills Have Eyes* from the average "rape and revenge" picture is that Craven is meticulous in establishing a sense of place. In *The Hills Have Eyes*, the audience is dumped into a barren, inhospitable world with no escape, and little hope. In the unbroken opening shot of the film, Craven's camera pans across the hills while strange sounds dominate the soundtrack and the credits roll. It is an eerie sequence immediately setting up the dynamic of the desert as a player in the ensuing battle. Many later scenes find the Carters as tiny, insignificant specks in a frame packed with rocks and yucca plants. The Carters are minuscule lost souls on a vast battlefield ... overcome by their surroundings.

The success of *The Hills Have Eyes* also stands on Craven's ability to simultaneously foster disgust and sympathy for the unwashed villains. Sure, they are rotten, baby-stealing, dog-killing thugs ... but they are desperate. In recognizing that fact, and in balancing the Jupiter clan with the more "normal" Carters, Craven reveals how anybody can be driven to desperate acts when life is at stake. *The Hills Have Eyes* is a startling, disturbing and fast-paced horror film of unparalleled impact. It looks at the heart of man, and asks in meaningful ways how environment dictates action.

LEGACY: *The Hills Have Eyes* further established Wes Craven's position as a master of the macabre. A straight-to-video sequel followed in 1985 (*The Hills Have Eyes II*), and there has long been talk of a third film to be set in the desert of outer space. Some sources also list *Wes Craven Presents Mind Ripper* (1995) as *The Hills Have Eyes III*.

As a result of his role as Pluto, actor Michael Berryman has become a fixture in horror and science fiction productions, appearing in the

TV movie *Invitation to Hell* (1984), *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), the 1988 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode “Conspiracy,” and even *The X-Files* (1993–2002).

***The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977) * * ½**

Critical Reception

“Depressingly unatmospheric remake ... which, despite care in all departments, never chills or convinces.... Burt Lancaster is monumentally miscast ... worth seeing only for the make-up.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, pages 80–81.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Burt Lancaster (Dr. Moreau); Michael York (Andrew Braddock); Nigel Davenport (Mr. Montgomery); Barbara Carrera (Maria); Richard Basehart (Sayer of the Law); Nick Cravat (M'Ling); the Great John L. (Boarman); Bob Ozman (Bullman); Fumio DeMura (Hyenaman); Gary Baxley (Lionman); John Gillespie (Tigerman); David Cass (Bearman); Eric Cord (Stunt Coordinator); Tony Eppe (Stuntman).

CREW: American International Pictures and Samuel Z. Arkoff Present a Skip Steloff/Sandy Howard/Major Production. *Based on the Novel by:* H.G. Wells. *Edited by:* Marion Rothman. *Music:* Laurence Rosenthal. *Director of Photography:* Gerry Fisher. *Executive Producers:* Samuel Z. Arkoff, Sandy Howard. *Screenplay:* John Sherman Shaner, Al Ramru. *Produced by:* John Temple-Smith, Skip Steloff. *Directed by:* Don Taylor. *Production Design:* Philip Jefferies. *Production Supervised by:* Elliott Schick. *In Charge of Post-production:* Salvatore Billitteri. *Creative Make-up:* John Chambers, Dan Striepeke, Tom Burman. *Creative Consultant:* David

Winters. Casting: Betty Martin. Production Manager: John G. Wilson. First Assistant Director: Bob Bender. Second Assistant Director: Richard Luke Rothschild. Second Unit Director of Photography: Ronnie Taylor. Camera Operator: Bernie Ford. First Assistant Camera: Michael Rutter. Script Supervisor: Pamela Dorothy Carlton. Sound Mixer: David Hildyard. Boom: Michael Tucker. Wardrobe Designer: Richard La Motte. Costumes: Emma Porteus, Rita Woods. Make-up Artists: Ed Butterworth, Walter Schenck, Michael McCracken, Thomas Hoerber, Edward F. Henriques III, Joseph DiBella, Richard Dobos, Frederick McCoy, James McCoy. Hairstylists: Dione Talor, Ann Wadlington, Sheral Ross. Gaffer: Raymond Potter. Best Boys: Terrance Potter. Special Effects: Cliff Wenger. Assistant Special Effects: Cliff Wenger, Jr. Property Master: Craig Raiche. Set Decorator: James Berkey. Assistant Editor: Bill Carruth. Apprentice Editor: Charles V. Coleman. Music Supervisor: Bodie Chandler. Orchestrations: Alexander Courage. Animals: Enchanted Village, Inc. Animal Stunt Coordinator: Ralph D. Helfen. Sound: Ryder. Color: Movielab. Titles and Optical: Pacific Titles. A Cinema 77 Film. Released by AIP. M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. Running Time: 99 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A lifeboat from the *Lady Vain* washes up on a remote island with one survivor aboard: ship's engineer Andrew Braddock. As Braddock searches the shore for signs of habitation, a shadowy, animal figure drags Braddock's dead companion into the brush. Running from the unseen monster, Braddock lands in a hunting trap and is rendered unconscious. When he awakens, he finds himself in a compound populated by a haughty man called Dr. Moreau, his Neanderthal-like manservant, M'Ling, and his mercenary muscle, Mr. Montgomery. Moreau has been on the island for eleven years conducting strange scientific research about the nature of life.



The Humanimals of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977) rise against their human oppressors.

When he feels better, Braddock dines with Moreau and meets a beautiful and innocent woman named Maria. Though Braddock is smitten with Maria, he is disturbed by the strange animal sounds emanating from the forest.

Braddock learns from Moreau that the scientist is fascinated with genetics. He believes the development and understanding of man's cells is the most important advance imaginable. To this end, he has been conducting experiments that develop the island's wildlife into half-human creatures capable of speech and even intelligent thought. Braddock learns that the island is full of these "humanimals," and that Moreau has been playing God: giving them laws, a societal hierarchy and even a Lord to worship. Though Andrew is horrified by Moreau's cruel experiments, his distaste for his situation is tempered briefly when Maria seduces him. But before long, Braddock learns that he is trapped in Moreau's world: the next supply ship is not due for two years. Desperate to escape,

Braddock repairs his lifeboat, and makes plans with Maria to flee the island at the earliest opportunity.

One of the humanimals kills a tiger, tasting blood for the first time, and Moreau fears a revolution. Braddock aggravates the situation when he kills a wounded humanimal out of mercy. To the animals, this act is a flagrant disregard of Moreau's law "not to shed blood." The humanimals demand that Braddock face punishment, as they do, in Moreau's house of pain (i.e. laboratory). Moreau acquiesces and begins inhumane experimentation on Braddock, turning him from man to beast in a matter of days.

Montgomery attempts to save Braddock, even as Braddock struggles to retain his humanity, but Moreau shoots Montgomery, killing him. Now Moreau has crossed the line, and Maria knows it. She gives Montgomery's body to the humanimals so they can understand Moreau's hypocrisy. He tells them not to kill, yet he kills. The angry beast-men, led by the sayer of the law, openly challenge Moreau for breaking the laws of God. Frenzied, the animals surround Moreau and maul him. Then, they drag his body through the compound and destroy his lab. Before long, Moreau's compound is in flames.

Braddock and Maria flee the island in his lifeboat as the humanimals destroy Moreau's work. Once at sea, Braddock finds his humanity slowly re-asserting itself, even as a sea vessel arrives to rescue the duo.

COMMENTARY: One of the primary dreads of the 1970s involved "science gone awry." *Westworld* (1972), *Embryo* (1976) and *Demon Seed* (1977) are just a few of the films from the decade that found reasons to question and fear 20th century man's scientific advances. Considering the popularity of this theme, it is natural that a clever producer decided to resurrect H.G. Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau*. This is the story of a man, a Frankenstein, who wants to understand how man is "made," an obsession that leads him to conduct horrible, inhumane experiments. Perhaps not surprisingly, this 1970s version of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* looks to other, more recent sources, for inspiration too. Portions of the film recall *Planet of the Apes* (1968), while the casting of Michael York as an innocent railing against a brutal hierarchy recalls his role as "liberator" in the futuristic blockbuster *Logan's Run* (1976).

Unfortunately, this movie looks much like a *Planet of the Apes* wannabe, and is even helmed by a franchise director, Don Taylor of *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971). The film features rich-throated actors such as Richard Basehart (rather than Maurice Evans...) under “animal make-up” and concerns a stranded hero (Michael York rather than Charlton Heston...) uncovering an isolated society in a world of natural beauty. In that same society, human-like animals have attained the power of speech and other human characteristics. The leader of the animals is called the sayer of the law (the lawgiver?), and the stranded human romances an innocent girl (not Linda Harrison’s Nova, but Barbara Carrera’s Maria). There are even hunts through the woods as the animals chase man. Coming fast on the heels of the *Apes* saga, it is hard not to view *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as derivative of the blockbuster franchise, even though much of this material clearly goes back to Wells. Still, what matters is how something is presented, and the action-adventure qualities of this *Moreau* reflect qualities captured so perfectly by *Planet of the Apes*.

The casting is also strangely derivative, and in at least one case, seriously misguided. Michael York performs well as Braddock and he certainly should, since he played the same role in *Logan’s Run*. He is in that same open-faced, innocent mode of a man discovering an unpleasant truth about a “culture” and railing against it. Here, Braddock at first assists Moreau and Montgomery, but then begins to challenge the established society on the island, just as Logan went from being dedicated Sandman to revolutionary and “runner.” In both cases, York leaves behind an old culture, literally in flames. Yet the performance is a good and likable one, even if it is familiar.

The same might be said of lovely Barbara Carrera. Just the year before, she portrayed a character similar to Maria, an innocent in “a relationship” with an older man and mentor, in *Embryo* (1976) ... only there it was Rock Hudson instead of Burt Lancaster.

Burt Lancaster is woefully miscast as the villainous Moreau, and that is the most serious blunder the film makes. This wonderful actor doesn’t seem to view Moreau as villainous, but rather as a human character with understandable, even notable motivations. That is an interesting interpretation, but let’s face it, Moreau should

be a mad scientist ... this is a schlock horror film after all, and probably, a schlocky actor would have imbued Moreau with the right sense of overwhelming dementia and power. Lancaster's Moreau is more like a stern teacher, chiding students to see things his way. This is a serious problem because Lancaster's Moreau is neither charismatic nor "big" enough to give York a sufficient threat to push up against. Since Lancaster is not a grand enough villain, York goes from being a hero to merely being petulant at important plot points.

Despite these flaws, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is a beautiful-looking film. The film opens with a great shot of a lifeboat adrift in the deep blue sea. The camera pans back slowly to reveal water and more water, and finally, more water. It is a shot of great scope and isolation, and a solid note to open on. It reveals just how alone Braddock is, and how isolated he will be, even on the island. Director Taylor also contrasts the beauty of nature with Moreau's ugly attempts to play God. It's a great contradiction, and Taylor makes the most of unnatural evil in a place of such natural beauty.

Moreau's final comeuppance also achieves iconic significance through clever framing and staging. As the climax of the picture comes, he is hanged from a tree in the foreground of the shot while his compound—and his life's work—burns endlessly in the background. He has been "hoisted" by his own rope literally, but more importantly, his hellish work has finally been consumed in a hell storm of fire and rage. The audience knew all along that his experiments could come to no good end, and Taylor satisfies the audience with this beautifully composed shot, which places Moreau's work and life in horrific—but just—perspective.

Taylor also reveals flair in staging the numerous action sequences. Though the humanimals never seem scary (any more than the apes in *Planet of the Apes* are scary...), the final battle between York and one of their number is well choreographed and thrilling. The moments when actors (dressed as animals) tackle and wrestle real animals (such as tigers), are pure spectacle, and showcased beautifully.

After a viewing of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* one is left with a feeling of mild satisfaction. The film has some great moments, some

interesting talk about protean genetic exploration, and the beautiful Carrera, but overall is not dynamic enough to remain very memorable, perhaps because Lancaster doesn't bring a larger-than-life charm to his tragic character. That established, this film is worlds better than the 1996 remake...

LEGACY: Itself a remake of *Island of Lost Souls* (1933), this version of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* was re-made yet again in 1996. The third version starred Marlon Brando as the villainous doctor and featured Val Kilmer and David Thewlis in lead roles.

***Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

“...a bit hard to swallow. However, the emphasis on character, usually totally absent in such films, and the attempt to provide an atmosphere of rationality and esalating fear, sets this film apart.... *Star Trek's* William Shatner contributes a nice performance....”—Douglas Menville and R. Reginald, *Futurevisions: The New Golden Age of Science Fiction Films*, a Greenbriar Book, Newcastle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985, page 43.

“First-rate, low-budget chiller, which clearly derives from Hitchcock's *The Birds* ... but nonetheless carries a powerful frisson of its own.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 85.

Cast & Crew

CAST: William Shatner (Rack Hansen); Tiffany Bolling (Diana Ashley); Woody Strode (Walt Colby); Lieux Dressler (Emma Washborn); David McLean (Sheriff Gene Smith); Natasha Ryan (Linda); Joe Ross (Johnson); Marcy Lafferty (Terry); Adele Malis (Betty Johnson); Altovise Davis (Birch Colby); Roy Engel, Hoke Howell, Bill

Foster, Whitey Hughes, Jay Lawrence, Bettie Bolling, Juanita Merritt, Nadia Caillou, Valla Rae McBroe, Jon-Jon.

CREW: Dimension Pictures Presents *Kingdom of the Spiders*. *Director of Photography:* John Morrill. *Executive Producer for Dimension Productions:* Sidney D. Balkin. *Film Editors:* Steve Zaillian, Igo Kantor. *Music Supervisor:* Igo Kantor. *Songs Sung by:* Dorsey Burnette. *First Assistant Director:* Larry Kostroff. *Second Assistant Director:* John Burnwell. *Production Supervisor:* Joseph Napolitano, Paul Nelson. *Production Coordinator:* Marti Litis. *Script Supervisor:* Karen Reid. *Set Decorator:* Rusty Rosene. *Property Master:* Mickey Guinn. *Special Effects:* Greg Ruer. *Assistant Editor:* Dan Retz. *Spiders Supplied by:* Lou Schumacher. *Spider Handler:* Jim Bockett. *Technical Consultant:* Dr. Elbert L. Sweeper. *Titles and Optical:* Freeze Frame. *Sound:* Ryder Sound Services. *Associate Producer:* J. Bond Johnson. *Executive Producer:* Henry Fownes. *Screenplay:* Richard Robinson, Alan Cailou. *From an Original Story by:* Jeffrey M. Sneller, Stephen Lodge. *Produced by:* Igo Kantor, Jeffrey M. Sneller. *Directed by:* John “Bud” Cardos. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Verde Valley, Arizona, veterinarian “Rack” Hansen is called out to the Colby ranch when a healthy cow is found dead in a pasture. He seeks help from the lab in Flagstaff to determine the cause of death, and mulls over the idea of quarantining the place, an idea vehemently disliked by the town mayor, who worries about an upcoming town fair. From Flagstaff’s Department of Entomology comes Dr. Diane Ashley, who forwards the unusual theory that spiders killed the Colby cow. After settling in at Emma Washburn’s lodge, Diane joins forces with Rack to test her hypothesis.

The following morning, Diane and Rack visit the Colby farm and learn that the family dog, Old Jake, is also dead ... a victim of spider bites. Then Colby shows them a gigantic spider hill teeming

with thousands of the creatures. While Rack visits the wife and daughter of his dead brother, Diane examines a captured spider. At dinner, Rack and Diane determine that overuse of insecticide in Verde Valley is killing off spider food sources, causing spiders to work together in colonies, like ants, and act aggressively towards livestock, and even people. Frightened by this spider migration, Rack and Diane race to the Colby farm and burn the spider hill.

Before long, the spiders strike back, killing Walt Colby as he drives to town. Poor Colby crashes his car, and the authorities find him cocooned in a web—dead, but kept in storage as food. Soon, thirty more spider hills are discovered around town, and the mayor suggests spraying them with pesticide—even though it was pesticide that caused the swing in the spider’s behavior in the first place. The plan is reluctantly approved, but the crop-duster crashes and the pilot is killed when spiders overrun his cockpit. Then the battle begins in earnest, with millions of spiders on the march.

The arachnids kill Mrs. Colby, while Rack rescues his niece, Linda, from the spiders. He is too late to save Terry, his sister-in-law, and retreats to Washburn’s lodge. As Verde Valley is overrun by spiders, Diane meets up with Rack and Linda at Emma’s.

The spiders mass on the lodge grounds, even as the town’s infrastructure collapses—with telephone operators and policemen killed and then webbed as food. At the lodge, the spiders try to break in, and Diane and Rack use chemical fire extinguishers to combat them. Soon, there are too many spiders to fend off. They gather at the windows, mass on the door, and drop down through the chimney in ever-increasing numbers. The spiders even plunge the harried humans into darkness by destroying the fuse box in the basement. Rack repairs the box, but not before the arachnids attack him. After multiple bites, he barely survives the jaunt.

A new dawn comes to Verde Valley. There is nothing on the radio, and no sign of help. An injured Rack gazes out one of the lodge’s window and sees, to his shock, that the entire valley has been cocooned in a colossal spider’s web.

COMMENTARY: *Kingdom of the Spiders* is the film that *Frogs* (1972) wishes it could have been. This “revenge of nature” horror story, in

which spiders turn on humanity, is produced on a low budget, but it delivers the goods. Not only is the film rich on characterization, but it exploits an innate human disgust with spiders in an out-of-control, riveting finale. Spiders drop from the ceiling, skitter under doors, crawl across beds, and teem *everywhere* ... and the overall effect is nothing short of skin crawling. This is the kind of movie that will have you checking nervously under the covers before going to bed. And, some kind of bravery award should be bestowed on the cast (including William Shatner), who appear in various “full body contact” shots with the arachnids. Because the actors repeatedly expose themselves to the spiders (sometimes dozens of spiders in one shot...) they sell the threat of the spider invasion explicitly, and make the film feel real in a way that *Night of the Lepus* (1979), *Frogs* (1972) and others of this sub-genre never manage.

The temptation in a film such as this one is to create a bunch of two-dimensional characters that are so unlikable that when they die at the hands (or paws) of the rampaging animals, audiences feel a sense of justice and comeuppance. It is easier to create hissable, two-dimensional villains like Ray Milland and his rich, sycophantic family in *Frogs* than to take the time to populate a film with people who seem true to life. Delightfully, *Kingdom of the Spiders* has an adept hand at creating meaningful characters with broad strokes.



The spiders attack a crop-duster in *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977).

Take Emma Washburn, for instance. She's just a middle-aged woman who runs a lodge, but the film pauses a moment to develop her as a human being. She is revealed to be a woman who once had a love affair with the town sheriff, and still misses him. This revelation not only elevates her above possible victim, it enriches audience identification with another supporting character, the sheriff. When the sheriff ultimately dies, the audience cannot help but think of Emma, and how she will be shattered by his demise.

Walter Colby and his wife are likewise revealed to be very human. They've banked all their hopes on their new calf and face economic collapse because of the spider migration. Like Emma they feel very frail and very human ... so easy to identify with. There is no big dramatic arc to their lives—just the sense of regular people trying to survive personal and financial setbacks.

Even Shatner is restrained in this film, portraying a man with so strong a sense of duty that he tends to the family of his deceased

brother. His decency is on display so clearly that the audience can't help but like him. All of this identification (with Rack, with Emma, with the sheriff, with Colby) is, as most good horror films realize, a necessary step in generating suspense. Viewers associate with their hopes and their desperation, and their fear, and so when the spiders finally go ballistic, the audience is involved. It's a simple equation creating "human" characters, but so many horror films neglect to do it. It is a delight to report that *Kingdom of the Spiders* puts people first, so that when horror comes, it is all the more meaningful (and intense).

Also, it is a truism that many horror films prove disappointing because they simply cannot deliver on all the "build-up." *Night of the Lepus* is a primary example. Even a likable, solid cast, could not generate suspense once it was known that the villains were life-sized rabbits blown-up to gargantuan proportions. Immediately, *Kingdom of the Spiders* has a leg-up in its choice of monsters. Spiders, for whatever reason, are especially frightening to a large percentage of the population. With their many legs and bulbous thorax, these creatures seem alien, different, to us. Rabbits, with their soft fur and mammalian aspects seem closer to humanity ... and downright cuddly. Not so with spiders. They are scary right off the bat, so *Kingdom of the Spiders* has a much lesser problem to surmount. It is easy to be frightened by an onslaught of spiders ... they give one the creepy crawlies just by their appearance.

But even a scary monster is not a "plus" to a horror film unless it is fully integrated into the human world. Again, consider *Frogs*. All of the frog footage seemed to be shot on second unit, and never met up with the human component. In fact, Ray Milland and the frogs were never in the same shot together! It was as if Milland (or the frogs...) was phoning in the performance. There was no sense of threat because the audience understood implicitly that the actors would never get that close to the menace, and suspense was dissipated. *Kingdom of the Spiders* corrects that mistake, featuring humans and spiders together in virtually every attack sequence. There is one nerve-wracking sequence in which little Natasha Ryan sits on a bed surrounded by dozens of live spiders—all crawling within inches of her. She screams at the top of her lungs, and it is easy to understand why! Shatner rescues her, of course, but the

horror is authentic. There are no cheap optical superimpositions (like *Ben* [1972]) or quick cuts between two units of photography (like *Frogs*). Before *Kingdom of the Spiders* is done, Shatner has been showered in spiders on many occasions. They cling to his face, crawl through his hair, inch their way up his legs. It is intense, it is real, and you'll be terrified.

When *Aliens* came out in 1986, Joel Siegel remarked that the last half an hour of the film was like experiencing a Bruce Springsteen concert from inside the bass drum ... the experience was that intense. *Kingdom of the Spiders* is not nearly as good a film as *Aliens*, for a variety of reasons including budgetary ones, but it has a comparable level of intensity in its climax. Spiders fall from a ceiling vent, silently enter the lodge through a chimney, mass on windows, teem beneath a child's swing, and dangle from a light bulb, basically showing up everywhere. There is no sanctuary, no solace, and the film achieves a heart-thumping adrenaline as humans seek escape and safety from the multi-legged threat. It is a frightening climax to the picture, and one that stops for nothing.

To top it all off, there is the final twist: the town cocooned. That is the perfect frightening (but strangely serene...) image to leave the audience with after the siege of the spiders. There is more terror to come ... the spiders will return, and they will eat you.

Of course, this reviewer would be remiss if he didn't point out that much of the film is designed, like *Grizzly* or *The Car*, to be a *Jaws* knock-off. The beaches won't be closed, but Rack does want to close down the town fair. And, certainly, all of the spider P.O.V. shots recall the "stalking" subjective shots of Spielberg's killer fish story. Yet *Kingdom of the Spiders* feels less derivative purely because of the threat. Spiders are pretty scary, just like sharks. A bear, a car, even worms (*Squirm* [1976]) don't generate the same level of discomfort that spiders do. In fact, were you to conduct an informal poll, more people might report a fear of spiders than a fear of sharks. The thing about spiders is that in great numbers they are terrifying, and their small size allows them access to "safe" places such as beds, sinks, table-tops, car interiors, vents, fuse-boxes and the like. A shark can't hide in your fuse-box; in fact, you won't run into a shark unless you go to the ocean. Spiders can invade your home ... and

that makes them quite a threat when mobilized.

Finally, *Kingdom of the Spiders* is refreshing in that it has no pretension to be great art. It is a scary movie, pure and simple, and it has a sense of humor in its proceedings. It knowingly and wickedly trumps *Willard* (1971) in one scene, by depicting a mass of spiders killing a rat. It also plays with audience expectations, seemingly as willing to generate a laugh as a scare. In one splendidly directed sequence, a spider follows Diane Ashley (Tiffany Bolling) as she prepares to shower (another bizarre homage to *Psycho*). The camera lovingly follows the spider's progress ... but the scene ends in a laugh and sigh of relief, instead of a death. Even the whole country-western motif of the film is kind of fun, creating a gentle feeling of homespun reality in the opening sequences before moving into straight-faced horror for the conclusion. Though some may wince at William Shatner's beer-guzzling cowboy veterinarian, he carries his scenes off with a light touch, never mocking the material, but letting the audience in on his delight in putting across such absurd notions.

There are no two ways about it, *Kindgom of the Spiders* is a great low-budget horror film, probably the best of the 1970s "animal" pack (after *Willard*), and it bristles with delight, suspense, humor, and in the end, flat-out shock.

***The Last Wave* (1977) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

"An intriguing cultural-mystical exercise, *The Last Wave* is like an aboriginal Revelations told as a Lovecraft-like mystery."—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 221.

"*The Last Wave* is over-deliberate; the camera movements are ominous as if by habit ... hokum without the fun of hokum. Despite all its scare-movie apparatus, the film fairly aches to be called profound... Weir has reversed the techniques

needed for audience involvement. Instead of starting with the ordinary ... and building to a hallucinatory climax, he uses his dislocating trick at the start. But when Weir gets to the mystic big number.... He is prosaic just when he needs to be imaginative to pull the film together.”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, January 22, 1979.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Richard Chamberlain (David Burton); Oliva Hamnett (Annie Burton); Gulipilli (Chris Lee); Frederick Panslow (Reverend Burton); Vivean Gray (Doctor); Nandijwarra Amagula (Charlie); Walter Amagula (Gerry Lee); Roy Dara (Larry); Cedrick Lalara (Lindsey); Morris Lalara (Jacko); Peter Carroll (Michael Zeadler); Athol Compton (Billy Corman); Hedly Cullen (Judge); Michael Duffield (Andrew); Wallas Eaton (Morgue Doctor); Jo England (Babysitter); John Frawley (Policeman); Jennifer DeGreenlaw (Secretary); Richard Henderson (Prosecutor); Penny Leach (School Teacher); Merv Lilley (Publican); John Meagher (Morgue Clerk); Guido Rametta (Guido); Malcolm Robertson (Don Fishburn); Greg Rowe (Carl); Katrina Sedgwick (Sophie Burton); Ingrid Weir (Grace Burton).

CREW: A World-Northal Corporation Presents *The Last Wave*. *Screenplay:* Peter Weir, Tony Morphet, Petru Popescu. *Director of Photography:* Russell Boyd. *Editor:* Max Lemon. *Music:* Charles Wain. *Production Designer:* Goran Warff. *Produced by:* Hal McElroy, James McElroy. *Directed by:* Peter Weir. *Production Manager:* Ross Matthews. *Camera Operator:* John Seale. *Sound Recordist:* Don Connolly. *Art Director:* Neil Angwin. *Special Effects:* Monty Fieguthi, Bob Hilditeh. *Assistant Special Effects:* Dennis Smith. *Make-up and Hair:* Jose Perez. *Assistant Make-up:* Lloyd James. *Wardrobe:* Annie

Bleakley. *Set Decorator*: Bill Malcolm. *Advisor on Aboriginal Matters*: Lance Bennett. A McElroy and McElroy Production in Association with Derek Power, the South Australian Film Corporation and the Australian Film Commission. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 120 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Menacing storm clouds gather over Sydney and much of the Australian continent. At an isolated schoolhouse in central Australia, hail plummets from the sky in chunks, injuring students and inflicting major property damage.

Back in Sydney, a young aboriginal man named Billy Corman has stolen something of great value from his mysterious people. The thief flees in the dark from pursuers, and then abruptly dies when a medicine man points a ceremonial bone at him and utters something in the aboriginal language. Charged for Corman's murder is a gang of aboriginals who chased him that night. Among the accused is a thoughtful man named Chris Lee. Although the coroner's report claims Corman drowned in a puddle, there is no clear cause of death except that "his heart stopped beating."

A British lawyer living in Sydney with his family, David Burton, is subsequently asked to defend the accused men, who will stand trial for the bizarre death. Over his wife's objections, Dave agrees to do so, and sets about to prove that his clients are innocent. He feels the key to winning the case is proving that the death was tribal-related, in which case a guilty verdict would be harder to come by. David's associates feel this is a lost cause because, they insist, there is no tribal activity in Sydney. David does not believe this explanation, and invites Chris Lee to dine at his house to talk about the case.

Clouding the matter, Chris Lee turns out to be a man that David has had disturbing visions of for some time. When Chris comes to dinner with a "friend" named Charlie, Dave explains that he has seen Chris in dreams. That revelation sparks the interest of Charlie, who may be cleverer than he reveals. Chris tells David that Billy Corman also saw things he should not see, and that is why he died. But, in David's dream, things are more specific than that. In the vision, Chris is holding a sacred stone with aboriginal markings and offering it to David. Was this object, seen only in dreams, the object

Corman stole from his people? Chris Lee reveals that dreaming is a sense, a way of knowing things, and that Charlie fears David because of his power to contact “the dream time.”

What is *dream time*? To the aboriginals there are two forms of time. There is daily reality, the world in which most people dwell, and then there is dream time: an infinite spiritual cycle that reveals important things about our world. Charlie believes that David is a descendant of a special tribe with the unusual power to have premonitory dreams. This is especially important because the aboriginal people also believe that every cycle of time ends with an apocalypse and then a re-birth. As David attempts to unravel this puzzle, he comes to believe that Charlie and his tribe are preparing for some sort of natural apocalypse, desiring it even, and that they fear he can stop it, or at the very least, predict its coming.

David’s dreams become more bizarre as black rain falls across Sydney. In one vision, he sees a city street and all of its inhabitants underwater. Fearful, David sends his wife, Annie, and his children away from the city.

At the trial, David puts Chris Lee on the stand and attempts to make him admit that Billy Corman’s death was tribal-related. Specifically, Charlie pointed a “death bone,” an aboriginal weapon, at Corman, thereby killing him. David nearly makes a breakthrough, but Charlie magically appears in court and his fearsome presence forces Chris to recant his testimony before the judge, prosecutor and jury.

Because of his dreams, David has begun to question his own origins. He asks a family priest why he didn’t tell David that “there are mysteries.” The priest, who has known David for years, reveals that as a child David dreamed of his mother’s death ... and it was an accurate prediction.

Wishing to understand all of these mysteries further, David is led by Chris Lee to sacred tribal sites and caves close to Sydney. In one cave, David sees a story painted on the wall in pictures: an epic battle about the end of one time cycle. In the drawn representation, a stranger from a different tribe, perhaps David himself, battles the aborigines, and a massive sea wave gathers to lay waste to all that 20th century white man has created. And the stone, the sacred

stone that Billy Corman stole, is part of the tapestry.

Suddenly, David is attacked by Charlie, wearing aboriginal tribal battle colors. David defeats Charlie in combat and flees from the sewers. Then David finds himself on the shore. He sees a massive ocean wave gathering steam. Is this the apocalypse, the end of the time cycle, the flood that will spur a re-birth?

The wave approaches...

COMMENTARY: Peter Weir's *The Last Wave* is an engrossing, if enigmatic, thriller, and a spiritual story of one man's self-discovery. The film is suffused with foreboding omens and portents, and successfully engulfs the audience in an unconventional world-view, specifically that of the aborigine. This is not your garden-variety horror film, filled with bloody set pieces or suspenseful attacks, but one of a more cerebral, more studied variety. The horror of this scenario emerges from the dawning comprehension that western man has blinded himself to his senses (including his ability to detect "dream time") and that a strange pagan faith may hold the key to understanding the human race's destiny.

Since Peter Weir is the man who directed *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), it should come as no surprise that there are few real answers to the mysteries depicted in *The Last Wave*. This is a film of indecipherable imagery and mystery, opening and closing with the bookends of anomalous phenomena (hail, a rainfall of frogs, and finally, a tidal wave). As in his previous film, Weir seems interested primarily in the world just underneath our perception of "conventional" reality, the world below modern civilization.

In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the forces of western society believed they had tamed the wilds of Australia, but an ancient rock—*perhaps a God, perhaps nothing more than a stone*—proved that conceit wrong by spiriting away a group of adolescent girls. *The Last Wave* occurs in Australia more than half a century later, when western society has constructed a thriving technological society upon the old aboriginal culture. Yet, importantly, the old ways have not been swept away or forgotten by this colonialism. The aborigines now practice their tribal ways in secret, even though their "land" is ostensibly 1,000 miles away in the desert. Near the climax of the

film, Dave (Chamberlain) discovers a tribal ground in and under the city proper: sacred sites and caves amidst the fabrications of modern man. It is a shadow world existing side by side with Dave's world, but few people (and no authorities) have taken the time to notice or acknowledge its existence. This is the literalization of Weir's central "two worlds" motif. Just as there is real time and dream time, so are there two cities: the real, and the "unreal" beneath.

Dave stumbles upon this "other" world almost by accident, and learns that his world is to be toppled in a second great flood. This is ordained, and, in fact, even considered routine. As he learns from Charlie and Chris, apocalypse is an accepted part (or end...) of every cycle of time. The aborigines desire this apocalypse because they understand the cycle of life, but Dave fears apocalypse because he is only just coming to terms with an understanding of this alternative world-view. Considering that the world is to die in a flood, it is appropriate that all of Dave's dreams and anxieties involve water. His dreams inevitably show rain, and his house becomes overrun by water when the bathroom taps are left open. In another shocking vision, Dave envisions himself in the driver's seat of his car as Sydney is totally submerged beneath the sea. Even Billy Corman's death involves water: it is believed he drowned, and his lungs filled with liquid, though that seems impossible. All of these images are indicators to Dave that the prophecy of the second flood, imagined by the aborigines, is real. It is interesting that he detects this truth not by conventional, logical or even legal (he's a lawyer...) means, but by dreams.

And that's where the journey of self-discovery comes in. Dave is a mild, traditional family man who has lost touch with his true nature. In his encounters with the culture of the aborigines—a society innately in touch with the land—he reawakens a power from his own childhood: the ability to access "dream time" and see the future. David is disappointed that his religion leaves no room for "mysteries" such as this, and he goes through a process of evolution in the film. At first bewildered and frightened by his dreams, he soon realizes that he has an important role in shaping things to come. It is his destiny to intervene—regardless of the result—in the coming apocalypse.

In a sense, Dave is losing one world as he gains another. His religion and his family become less important to him as he realizes that he knows, and in fact has always known, that there are secrets and patterns in the cycle of life. It is implicit that Dave's Christian faith is lacking, because it does not speak to destiny, fate, or the order of the universe.

This theme plays on a fear that many of us still face today, in the 21st century. Somehow, many believe, our fax machines, computers, telephones, cars, and other luxuries have separated us from the very Earth from which we sprang. We feel cut off and alone, unable to connect meaningfully with other people or even the land we live on. Many people believe that ancient man understood the mysteries of life better than we do today, and *The Last Wave* plays on all of these fears. What if there is an apocalypse coming, and nobody can see it or stop it because the gifts we've been given to detect such destruction have been lost or undeveloped?

In *The Last Wave*, Weir makes the most of several symbolic dream sequences, submerging the audience in a deep-seated fear of an inevitable disaster yet to come. The film is a deadly serious one, and in some ways lacking the lyricism of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, but it artfully asks questions that can only have unsettling answers. What if we've got this "reality" thing all wrong? What if we're walking, blissfully unaware, to a precipice? In focusing solidly on these questions, and couching them brilliantly in aboriginal lore, Weir challenges his audience to reconsider its faith, or faithlessness. Like the ocean wave of its title, this is a film that crashes down all around you, leaving you shivering and chilled ... but with fully awakened senses too.

***Night Creature* (1977) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Donald Pleasence (Axel); Nancy Kwan (Leslie); Ross Hagen (Ross); Lesly Fine (Peggy); Prakit Youngsri (Tom); Jennifer Rhodes (Georgia); Rachan Kanghanamat (Nippon)

CREW: Dimension Pictures and Lee Madden Associates Present *Night Creature*. *Executive Producer:* Lee Madden. *Screenplay by:* Hubert Smith. *From an Original Story by:* Lee Madden and Hubert Smith. *Produced by:* Ross Hagen. *Directed by:* Lee Madden. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Jim Helms. *Director of Photography:* Permhol Cheyaroon. *Editor:* Martin Dreffke. *Production Manager:* S. Imsart Shoosug. *Assistant Director:* Viscot Khemacheva, Pakorn Prohmvitak. *Production Assistant:* Claire Hagen. *Continuity:* Pairchart Borisute. *Gaffer:* Thanispong Sasimanop. *Assistant Camera:* Pripan Cheyaroon, Suree Cheyaroon. *Grips:* Vichai Kwangton, Kwhuang Timrat. *Property:* Somsak Rajpakdee. *Business Manager:* Patpon Cheyaroon. *Associate Producer:* Suzanne Jesse. *Costume Designer:* Claire Hagen. *Animal Work by:* “The Lion Wild Animal Rentals” Monty Cox. *Animals Supplied by:* Cougar Hill Ranch. *Titles, Opticals and Color by:* CFI. *Sound:* Glen Glenn Sound. *Sound Effects:* Echo Films Services, Glenn Co. From Lee Madden Associates, Inc., Productions. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 84 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In Bangkok, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, big game hunter and “living legend” Axel MacGregor sets off into the jungle to hunt a black panther that has been terrorizing local villages and killing people. During the hunt, the panther unexpectedly pounces on Axel ... but lets him live, and then disappears into the forest.

Shaken, MacGregor returns to his remote island home and gives all of his servants two weeks’ paid vacation. Then, MacGregor offers a \$10,000 reward for the capture of the panther, with whom he is now obsessed. The panther is soon netted and brought to MacGregor’s private paradise. There, MacGregor issues the panther a challenge: they will fight to the death. He will only keep one bullet in his rifle, to even the odds. Then, MacGregor releases the panther and commences the hunt, distinctly aware that the panther made him feel fear, and that he did not like that emotion.

Unfortunately, MacGregor's two daughters, a suitor, and a granddaughter have chosen this time to visit. They arrive on the island, unaware of the personal battle being waged. The first casualty of the panther is Socrates, the pet dog of Axel's granddaughter, Peggy. The second casualty is Georgia, MacGregor's eldest daughter (and Peggy's mom). She is killed while searching for Socrates, and MacGregor finds her bloody corpse.

Meanwhile, MacGregor's other daughter, Leslie, and her boyfriend, Ross, are concerned because young Peggy is missing. The next morning, MacGregor goes out in search of his grandchild. He finds her perched on a half-ruined bridge ... in close proximity to the murderous cat! MacGregor draws a bead on the panther, but his gun jams. He returns home, defeated, and realizes that he is afraid of his own cowardice. The panther attacks again, murdering a local named Tom.

Ross, MacGregor and Leslie plot to trap the beast in the compound. The plan works for a time, and the three survivors rescue Peggy as the cat is trapped inside MacGregor's estate. The cat breaks free and pursues the family to the dock. They escape the island on a boat, and MacGregor uses a flare gun to explode a barrel of gas. Even amidst the conflagration his enemy, the cat, survives ... triumphant.

COMMENTARY: Donald Pleasence portrays a Hemingway-style author and macho man in *Night Creature*, a low-budget film about a *mano-a-mano* duel between an arrogant man and a wily, black panther. Though the set-up of the story is interesting, and Pleasence's character is given a dramatic mid-life crisis to overcome, the film collapses under the weight of weak execution. Unfortunately, there is limited interaction between man and beast, so the duel is not as effectively dramatized as it might have been, and the film's characters behave quite stupidly at times.

Night Creature opens with some beautiful images of a panther hunting in the jungle, establishing the majesty and cunning of this graceful animal. It is, sadly, a brief glimpse, since the film then freezes each time a credit pops up, breaking the flow of the animal's movements. When the title card of the film comes into focus, it is oriented crookedly in the frame, which isn't a good sign of things to come. From there, the film follows Donald Pleasence as he hunts

the man-eater, believed to be a devilish creature. In cutting and pacing, however, *Night Creature* resembles an amateur movie, as it relies heavily on voice over narration (rather than dialogue and characterization) to reveal critical plot points.

Then comes the real gaffe: all the action shots are faked, and it is immediately apparent. Even when filmed in slow-motion photography, the panther's first assault on Pleasence seems horribly phony. The animal and the actor are never in the same shot, and the threat feels minimal. The horror movie's old friend, the P.O.V. subjective camera, is trotted out to double as the perspective of the lunging animal, but the technique is not strong enough to sell the idea that Pleasence is under attack. Throughout the film, this problem recurs: the main characters never seem to be in the same film as the sleek black cat. Even in the final chase, the director, Madden, resorts to superimposing the cat's face over footage of the actors as they scurry through the jungle for the dock and safety. Since the performers are never in proximity to the cat, rarely in the same shot even, the idea of two personalities, man and cat, in conflict, is all but lost. That's a shame, because a contest between animal nature and human nature could have been the stuff of a great film.

A good horror movie of the type *Night Creature* aspires to be understands that scares depend on the construction of a clever trap where options, time, and character actions (or inaction...) conspire to rob the heroes of opportunities. Thus tension mounts, and terror is generated. *Night Creature* starts off well by stranding all of its protagonists on an isolated island. Even better, the danger is a result of one character's (MacGregor's) arrogance. Had he not despised his own cowardice, he would never have brought the panther to his retreat. Yet once the set-up is established, director Madden does not seem capable of keeping up with it. Specifically, his story makes several improbable leaps in logic and motivation. For instance, Peggy, the MacGregor grandchild, is forgotten by the script's characters for long stretches of the film. Axel brings home her dead mother's corpse, and Leslie and Ross rush to his side, yet nobody mentions Peggy. Wouldn't a child be a first priority? Wouldn't someone at least check her room to make sure she is there?

Later, MacGregor and the others leave Peggy out in the cold rain on a bamboo bridge for a whole day when they know the deadly panther is nearby. They make no rescue attempt because they have no ammo, but at some point, wouldn't they at least *try* to rescue their kin? They could fashion spears, stage a decoy, anything to save the endangered child. Instead, they just let the cat and elements have at her for 24 hours!

The script is badly constructed because it wants to Peggy to be endangered, but at the same time live long enough for the film to feature scenes of character development on the island. All through Pleasence's mid-life crisis drama, in which he confronts his own need to be a legend and a hero, one can't help but think of that poor child trapped and scared out in the jungle. It just doesn't work. She should have become lost later in the film to generate a stronger climax, or died early in the film, giving it the feeling of tragedy it strives for. The filmmakers try to have it both ways.

Similarly, the *dramatis personae* in *Night Creature* simply do not behave as if they are in real danger once they realize the threat of the panther. Leslie, for instance, stands in front of the broken window in the kitchen, apparently unconcerned that the cat can now jump into the house. Later, MacGregor and Ross stand in front of an open door-sized window for a prolonged conversation, similarly ignoring the possibility of a panther strike. In a siege-style movie, these are not small details. There must be an overwhelming fear that outside of safety (the house) the cat lurks and is ready to strike. But the characters in *Night Creature* hardly seem to care. Again, one remembers *Night of the Living Dead*, and how any character who forgot to stay away from the windows came to regret it, as groping hands reached in to point out the error of their ways. That should have been the model for suspense here.

Described in some corners as Thailand's answer to *Jaws*, *Night Creature* could have been a good film. Perhaps it is just this author's personal bias, but big cats like the panther seen in this film are demonstrative of grace, intelligence, and cunning. They may not seem evil or physically alien (like spiders), but they do radiate smarts, and would hence seem to have the stuff of being good opponents in a film of this type (witness *The Ghost and the Darkness*

[1996]). Pleasence is also a fine choice for this lead role, combining arrogance and regret in equal parts. Yet when MacGregor says “I suddenly feel very old, tired and stupid,” the audience wants to laugh because the script has forced the character to act stupidly rather than sensibly. A tighter script would have made for a smarter movie.

***Orca* (1977) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...it’s a flounder. A good production designed by Mario Garbuglia and some nice sea photography by Ted Moore cannot save the story.... No actor could do much with this script but Harris seems particularly inept and Rampling is so chic ... it’s possible she thought she was in another movie.”—H. James, *Films in Review*, Volume XXVIII, Number 8, October 1977, page 50.

“If it were medically possible to overdose on claptrap, *Orca* would be compelled to carry a warning from the surgeon general ... this film about whales and men flounders after about 15 minutes ... nothing but total immersion in the ridiculous.”—Lawrence Van Gelder, *New York Times*, July 16, 1977, page 12.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Richard Harris (Nolan); Charlotte Rampling (Rachel Bedford); Will Sampson (Umilak); Bo Derek (Annie); Keenan Wynn (Novak); Robert Carradine (Ken); Scott Walker (Swain); Peter Hooten (Paul); Wayne Heffley (Priest); Vincent Gentile (Gas Station Attendant); Don “Rea” Barry (Dock Worker).

CREW: From Paramount, a Gulf-Western Company, a Famous Films N.V. Production, *Orca*. *Film Editors:*

Ralph E. Winters, John Bloom, Marion Rothman. *Production Design*: Mario Garbuglia. *Music Composed and Conducted by*: Ennio Morricone. *Director of Photography*: Ted Moore. *Original Story and Screenplay*: Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Donati. *Produced by*: Luciano Vincenzoni. *Directed by*: Michael Anderson. *Special Photographic Contributions*: J. Barry Herron. *Second Unit and Underwater Director*: Folco Quilici. *Shark Sequences in Australia*: Ron Taylor. *Production Managers (Canada)*: Stanley Neufeld, William O'Sullivan. *Unit Production Manager*: Les Kimber, Roberto DeLaurentiis, Pino Butti. *Assistant Director*: Brian Cook. *Second Assistant Director*: Peter Bennett, Terry Needham. *Second Unit Assistant Director*: Rob Lockwood, Flondar Brunetti. *Production Assistant*: Giuliano Principato. *Set Decorators*: Armando Scarano, John Godfrey. *Continuity Supervision*: Angela Allen. *Camera Operators*: John S. Harris, Jack Atcheler. *Focus Puller*: David Wynn Jones. *Assistant Cameraman*: Roger Berner. *Art Directors*: Boris Junaga, Ferinando Giovannoni. *Underwater Camera Operator*: Vittorio Dragonetti. *Assistant Underwater Camera Operator*: Massimiliano Sano. *Underwater Gaffer*: Ignazio Maccarone. *Underwater Stuntman*: Emilio Messina. *Sound Mixer*: John Bramall. *Re-recording Mixer*: Trevor Pyke. *Boom Man*: William Cook. *Key Grip*: Ray Hall. *Gaffer*: Maurice Gillett. *Property Masters*: Allan Jack Gordon, Bill Mac Sems. *Make-up Artist*: Neville Smallwood. *Hairstylist*: Jorge Paris. *Wardrobe*: Phillippe Pickford. *Wardrobe Assistant*: Ian Hickenbotham. *Special Effects*: Alex C. Weldon. *Chemical Effects*: Rinaldo Campoli. *Mechanical Effects*: Jim Hole, Giuseppe Carrozza. *Set Painter*: Guglielmo Modestini. *Construction Coordinator*: Aldo Puccini. *Miniature Coordinator*: Fernando Valento. *Stunt Coordinator*: Romano Puppo. *Costume Designer*: Jost Jakob. *Post-production Supervisor*: Phil Tucker. *Supervisor of Photographic Effects*: Frank Van Der

Veer. *Sound Effects*: Nick Stevenson, Winston Ryder. *Music Recording*: Sergio Marcotulli. *Music Editor*: Michael Clifford. *Assistant Film Editor*: Chris Kelly. *Music Recorded at*: Orthoponics Recording Studio. *Song*: “My Love, We Are One,” *Lyrics*: Carol Connors; *Music*: Ennio Morricone. *Titles*: Van Der Veer Photo. *Sea Camera Stabilization*: Tyler Camera Systems. *Director of Marine Mammal Training*: Sonny Allen. *Marine Mammal Trainer*: Frank Strzalkowski. *Casting*: Joyce Selznick and Associates. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *Color*: Technicolor. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 90 minutes.

P.O.V.

“I get really offended when people compare it [Orca] with *Jaws*. It’s going to make that movie look like an anemic sprat alongside it. It’s enormous in the true meaning of the word. Enormous and truly grand and majestic and beautiful. The characters are real people, three-dimensional people whose lives becoming inexorably laced into that of ... mammoth mammals of the sea”³⁴.—Richard Harris, defending *Orca* to critics.

SYNOPSIS: While studying the orca (*Orcinus Orca*), a highly intelligent species of killer whale, a cetacean biologist, Rachel Bedford, is menaced by a great white shark. She is protected from the jaws of death by the crew of the vessel Bumpo, captained by the old sea dog Nolan. Surprisingly, a killer whale beats Nolan to the punch, defending Rachel and killing the shark in the process.

Rachel teaches a class on whale-song and relays data indicating that killer whales possess a high order of intelligence. She befriends Nolan and learns that he desires to capture an orca and sell it to an aquarium. Rachel attempts to dissuade the fisherman, but he is out to prove that he is smarter than some “fish.” He takes the Bumpo to sea and runs down a school of killer whales. He inadvertently harpoons a pregnant female. When pulled up to the deck, she

spontaneously aborts her fetus and dies before the eyes of the crew. Worse, the whale's angry mate-for-life has seen the murder. The male orca attacks the Bumpo, killing a crewman named Novak. As the Bumpo heads inland, the angry whale tends to its dying mate ... and mourns her passing.

Back at shore, Bedford confronts Nolan over the murder. She warns him that the whale will follow and hunt him down for vengeance. A Native American, Umilak, tells Nolan a similar story, warning him to travel far from the orca's territory. Soon, the orca attacks the harbor, sinking all the local fishing boats ... a warning and a challenge. Scared fishermen order Nolan to leave port, their livelihoods threatened by a killer whale in their waters. By night, Nolan attempts to lure Orca to shore with a scarecrow Doppelgänger, but the whale is too smart to be tricked. It wants to fight at sea, on its own turf. The orca attacks elsewhere, destroying a gas pipeline and causing fires to erupt all over the seaside town. On another night, the whale attacks Nolan's cottage, bringing it down into the sea and biting off the leg of one of his crew, Annie.

Nolan swears to fight the whale. He takes the Bumpo, with Umilak and Rachel aboard, to meet the challenge at sea. They travel to the spot where the whale's mate was killed and wait for a confrontation. The whale leads the Bumpo north, to the polar ice caps. After several days of cat and mouse, the Bumpo runs low on fuel and is mired in ice. The whale kills another two crewmembers at night and Nolan becomes increasingly unhinged as days pass.

The whale pushes an iceberg toward the Bumpo while Umilak radios for help. The whale is harpooned but it runs the ship into an ice floe. Umilak is killed and the Bumpo sunk, leaving Nolan and Rachel stranded on the ice. Nolan falls into the water and Orca kills him, ending the blood feud once and for all and leaving Rachel to be rescued by a helicopter.

COMMENTARY: *Orca* is a better film than any sequel to *Jaws* yet made. In fact, it really shouldn't be compared to *Jaws* since it adopts a completely different approach in terms of storytelling. Instead of a story about a killer fish that feeds on humans and must be put down by local law enforcement, *Orca* is a revenge tale pure and simple. It's like *Death Wish* (1975) with fins ... only the orca,

the killer whale, is actually Charles Bronson, the hero of the tale.

Orca opens with a splendidly captured ballet at sea, a lovely dance between two whales frolicking in the most beautiful seas imaginable. This prologue establishes not only the friendly nature of these sea beasts, but the “life link” between the mates. Anyone who has ever seen a Chuck Norris or Charles Bronson film made in the ’70s or ’80s should recognize these moments immediately. They are the calm before the storm, the tragic prologue in which the hero’s peaceful life is established before, suddenly, it is irrevocably taken away. The first shot of the orcas at play reveals them swimming under gold sunlight, and the impression (supported by sentimental music) is of beauty, playfulness, and bliss. All is well ... and much will be lost.

Then nasty mankind gets into the picture, and the bond between the killer whales (who the film tells us are monogamous...) is severed when the thoughtless fisherman Nolan harpoons the female on what is basically a whim, designed to impress Rampling’s character. But, in a thoroughly nauseating moment, the pregnant female whale spontaneously aborts her fetus on deck and the audience’s sympathy goes permanently to the whales. A senseless crime has been committed against the hero (the male whale), and the sounds of the dying female squealing in pain are nothing short of agonizing. The film then treats the audience to a close up of the male’s angry eyes, as he views this crime and ingrains on his brain forever the image of the murderer who has done this. He has become obsessed now: his wife has been brutally killed for no reason, along with his own unborn child, and there will be hell to pay.

If only the orca carried a revolver, people would recognize this plot immediately as one of a wet *Death Wish*, rather than *Jaws* with a whale.

Interestingly, the film is also a kind of strange reversal of *Moby Dick*. It’s the story of a whale obsessed with a man, rather than vice versa. In fact, Melville is even quoted in the film. So, despite the obvious and audacious swipe at *Jaws* in the film’s first action sequence (in which an orca bumps off a great white shark with ease...), *Orca* has very little to do with the Spielberg film. Instead,

this is one of those “hero wronged and getting justice” stories that all action fans have come to know, love, and anticipate. The hero just happens to be a whale. And, one might state something else too: *Orca* is different from *Jaws* because it evinces sympathy for creatures in the sea rather than terror about them.

Ironically, even Peter Benchley, the author of *Jaws*, has now come around to this way of thinking, and recognizes sympathy as a superior and more rational emotion than blinding fear. So, though *Orca* is in no way, shape or form as good a horror film as *Jaws*, it does generate a different (and arguably) more ambitious emotion.

If the killer shark is indeed the hero of the film, then Richard Harris’s character, Nolan, is surely the villain. What’s rather rewarding about the film’s plot is that Nolan seems to be acutely aware of how he’s been cast in the drama. There are many details shared about Nolan’s past, including the fact that his wife and unborn child were killed by a drunk driver. Thus, in the fashion of all good *mano-a-mano*, macho action-thrillers, the hero and the villain are twisted sides of the same coin ... two of a kind. Like the Joker and Batman, these opponents have faced loss and are driven to kill by the actions of the other. Nolan gains some sympathy points since he attempts to take responsibility for his act and apologizes to the whale for his brutal mistake. Interestingly, Nolan is finally so sympathetic to his enemy that in the end he no longer feels right killing the whale. He has a clear shot at the animal and doesn’t take it. At one point, Nolan equates himself with the drunk driver who killed his family, thus making himself a reflection of his other enemy. If not particularly deep psychologically, this relationship between hunter and hunted at least makes the film more than a simple killer fish story.

Oddly, the killer bear movie *Grizzly* (1976) is actually more of a *Jaws* rip-off than this film. And, truthfully, it seems fair to state that *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987) is something of a rip-off of *Orca* ... only without the “hero wronged” template, and the strange symbiotic relationship between the protagonist and antagonist. In pure horror terms, *Orca* is not nearly as stirring or exciting as *Jaws*, but it does offer some beautiful seascapes and a thoroughly nihilistic ending that reflects on the cold price of vengeance and the harsh

consequences of thoughtless violence. This chill is felt both thematically, and in the setting of the climax: an iceberg. Not bad. Not brilliant, but not bad either.

Orca sports some funny miscues, and they may account for the film's reputation as a bad movie. Still, it is far more likely that the same people who disliked Dino De Laurentiis for foisting his remake of *King Kong* on the world hadn't forgiven him and wanted to give him one more kidney punch. But one such miscue involves Rampling's plight at the end of the film: she stands on an iceberg ... in perfect make-up, looking absolutely glamorous. It doesn't quite work, and one wonders if she has "tarted" herself up not for the depressed Nolan, but for the now single killer whale...

Others perceived the ending, in which the whale swims off to fight another day, as a narrative miscue, but it probably isn't really. Remember, this guy (*Orca*) is the hero of the picture! As he swims away into the end credits, his vendetta done, a love song is warbled over the film's final images. On the surface it may seem horribly silly to end an "attacking fish" story with a love theme. But really, the whole movie has been about love, and what lengths this emotional fish will go to for love. The corny pop music just makes obvious what the rest of the film pretty clearly suggests: Charles Bronson could have played the fish.

***The Pack* (1977) * * ½**

Critical Reception

“Somewhere inside *The Pack*, a modestly good movie struggles to find expression. But Robert Clouse’s script ... is almost indecently hasty in turning the characters into dog food, and his direction is monotonously relentless in its pursuit of the requisite thrills.”—Christ Petit, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 675.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Joe Don Baker (Jerry Preston); Hope Alexander-Willis (Millie); Richard B. Shull (Clyde Hardiman); R.G. Armstrong (Mr. Cobb); Ned Wertimer (Walker); Bib Besch (Marge); Delos V. Smith, Jr. (Mr. McMinnimee); Richard O’Brien (Dodge); Sherry Miles (Lois); Paul Willson (Tommy); Eric Knight (Guy); Steve Lytle (Paul); Bob Narke (Husband); Peggy Price (Wife); Steve Butts (Bobby).

CREW: A Fred Weintraub-Paul Heller Production.
Associate Producer: Eva Monley. *Executive Administrator:* Tully Friedman. *Editor:* Peter E. Berger. *Music:* Lee Holdridge. *Director of Photography:* Ralph Woolsey. *Screenplay:* Robert Clouse. *Based on the Novel by:* Dave Fisher. *Produced by:* Fred Weintraub and Paul Heller. *Directed by:* Robert Clouse. *Post-production Supervisor:* James O’Fallon. *Unit Production Manager and First Assistant Director:* Tommy LoFaro. *Second Assistant Director:* Win Phelps. *Location Manager:* Ron Bozman. *Camera Operators:* Eric Anderson, Jim Glennon. *Costumer:* Lynn Bernay. *Make-up:* Marv Westmore. *Hairstylist:* Gloria Algeo. *Property Master:* Russ

Goble. *Special Effects*: Milton Rice. *Dogs Furnished by*: Lou M. Schumacher. *Dogs Trained by*: Karl L. Miller. *Assisted by*: Roger W. Schumacher. *Trainers*: Dennis Grisco, Eddie Stephens, Scott Thorson, Reggie Wayne, Jerry Hardison. *Horse Wrangler*: Richard Ludin. *Sound Mixer*: Darin Knight. *Music Editor*: Eugene Marks. *Loop Editor*: Larry Singer. *Titles*: MGM. Animal Action Monitored and Approved by the American Humane Society. Filmed in Technicolor. *Distributed by*: Warner Brothers. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 99 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On remote Seal Island way up north, marine biologist and nature lover named Jerry Preston lives a simple and peaceful existence with his young son, Guy, and his dog, Rye. Recently, Jerry has fallen in love with a woman named Millie, and is in the midst of building a beautiful home for the families to share. But something terrible happens at the same time a group of obnoxious city folk—*bankers all*—have come up for a week's vacation. Specifically, a pack of rabid dogs has taken up residence at the old Parker barn near the local dump. Before long, these dogs have attacked Jerry's dog, Rye, and given him a nasty bite.

The dog attacks start slow, and then escalate. One night, an old blind man, Mr. McMinnimee, is attacked in his house after his seeing-eye dog, Zsa Zsa, is killed by the pack. Then, while walking in the woods, two vacationers, nerdy and virginal Tommy Dodge and the beautiful but slutty Lois, are killed. Now Jerry realizes Seal Island has a terrible problem, and marshals his forces by gathering up all the surviving vacationers and locals at his old place. Unfortunately, the weather is bad and all communication off the island is down, leaving Jerry, Millie and the others no choice but to defend themselves for three days—until the next ferry arrives. They barricade the Preston home, but the dogs attack relentlessly, jumping through windows, biting and scratching at the humans.

Afraid the group will not survive for 72 hours, old Mr. Cobb, another local, attempts to row his boat from the island to the mainland, but he dies of a stroke *en route*. Meanwhile, Mr. Dodge, Tommy's father, attempts to kill the dogs with his scout vehicle and

a shotgun, but ultimately succumbs to the pack. Another banker, Mr. Walker, barely survives a close call on a pier when the pack strikes again.

Growing more desperate by the moment, Jerry attempts a final confrontation. He lures the crazed dogs into his house and prepares to set it on fire. But the dangerous plan goes horribly wrong when the dogs break into the house too soon and start to ascend the pull-staircase to the attic: Jerry's only sanctuary. Facing off against the pack, Jerry's only protection is a coil-spring mattress...

COMMENTARY: As far as the horror cinema was concerned, the year 1977 might as well have been called the "Truth About Cats and Dogs" since both the panther epic *Night Creature* and the "rabid" dog movie *The Pack* were released in that span. In this case, the dogs fare slightly (but not much...) better than the felines. *The Pack* is a routine horror siege film with some high impact moments in which dogs and humans go head to head. For the most part, however, there is little suspense, and some of the dogs are awfully cute instead of menacing.

Following in the tradition of *Night of the Living Dead*, *Assault on Precinct 13* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Pack* is a siege movie through and through. In this case, a group of diverse individuals band together on an island sanctuary while wild dogs roam and kill. It's a battle to survive as the group awaits the next ferry—some 72 hours distant. In keeping with siege movie mentality, the film even offers the obligatory "failed attempt" to leave the "safe" compound and seek help. In *Night of the Living Dead*, there was the ill-advised gas station trip, which gave way to a crunchy human barbecue. In *Assault on Precinct 13*, a friendly convict attempted to escape the station house in a sewer, but was killed before he could make good his escape in a stolen car. In *The Pack*, an old man climbs in a rowboat to seek help at sea ... but dies of a stroke without delivering his critical message to the outside world. The implicit message of all these failed escape attempts is that in a siege situation the only option is to face the enemy, not run away from it.

Oddly, the attacking army at the gates in *The Pack* is not made of flesh-hungry zombies, vengeful gang members, or roving cannibals ... but man's best friend: the canine. Frankly, dogs have a spotty

history in horror movies. They can be menacing (*Cujo* [1981]), or stupid (*Killer Shrews* [1959]). In *The Pack*, they're both. In motion and in combat, these animals look fierce. They jump, growl, bare their teeth and roll. The final battle between Joe Don Baker and the pack, with only an old mattress between them, is pretty good, for instance. There is also a very intense five-minute sequence in which the dogs shatter windows, jump inside the barricaded house, chomp down on arms and legs, and attack people with a real ferocity. The editing is good in these moments, and the actors seem to be in mortal combat with the dogs. It doesn't look fake thanks to a combination of efficient cutting, brave stunt people and solid direction.

Contrarily, the dogs are not really scary in the film's many purportedly ominous "stand and wait sequences." Particularly, there are moments throughout *The Pack* in which characters spot dogs massing in the distance, standing at attention, or watching the foolish humans. In these moments, the dogs look like nothing but tame house pets accidentally let off their leashes. And dogs don't possess the innate sense of "intelligence" and "cunning" that felines do, so there is no sense of a dog "sentience" threatening the humans either. That's the problem with the movie. When a friendly collie joins the pack in the film, the moment evokes *Lady and the Tramp* or *Lassie* more than it does Stephen King.

But to blame *The Pack*'s mediocrity on the canines isn't completely fair. The writing goes to the dogs too. Though the movie is populated with a dream B cast including Bibi Besch, R.G. Armstrong, Richard Shull and Joe Don Baker, the performers are given characters of little substance. The audience never senses who they are losing when the various personalities die, and so the suspense is minimal except in that spectacularly staged final siege. In some senses, the screenplay evokes *Jaws* too, especially in the tepidly performed "banter" scenes between Baker and his love interest.

It is interesting from a historical perspective that *The Pack* isn't about radiation, hormones, or the supernatural ... all off-the-shelf explanations for bad animal behavior. These dogs go on the attack simply because they have been abandoned and mistreated by man.

Still, that explanation fits in with another seventies trend, though it isn't an obvious one: man is responsible when nature goes wacky. In addition to polluting the atmosphere and generally messing up the environment, he is bad to animals ... causing them to become starving, sick, vengeful killers instead of furry friends.

If only they weren't so cute...

***Rabid* (1977) * ***

Critical Commentary

“Virtually a remake of Cronenberg’s *The Parasite Murders* [*Shivers*], *Rabid* lacks the power of the earlier movie ... a film full of shocks as Cronenberg twists his supple narrative ... in a surprisingly playful fashion.”—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 330.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Marilyn Chambers (Rose); Frank Moore (Hart Read); Joe Silver (Murray Cypher); Howard Ryshpan (Dr. Dan Keloid); Patricia Gage (Roxanne Keloid); Susan Roman (Mindy Kent); J. Roger Periad (Lloyd Walsh); Lynne Deragon (Nurse Louise); Terry Schlonblum (Judy Glasberg); Victor Desy (Claude Lapointe); Julie Anna (Nurse Rita); Gary McKeenan (Smooth Eddy); Terrence G. Ross (Farmer); Miguel Fernandes (Man in Cinema); Robert O’Ree (Police Sergeant); Greg Van Riel (Young Man in Plaza); Jerome Tiherghfen (Dr. Karl); Jeanette Casenave (Camper Lady); Allan Moyle (Young Man in Lobby); Richard Farrell (Camper Man); Carl Wasserman (Camper Child); John Boylen (Young Cop in Plaza); Malcolm Neithorpe (Older Cop in Plaza); Vlasta Vrana (Cop at Clinic); Kirk McColl (Desk Sergeant); Jack Messinger (Policeman on Highway); Yvon Lecompte (Policeman); Grant Lowe (Tracker); John

Gilbert (Dr. Royce Gentry); Tony Angelo (Dispatcher); Peter McNeill (Loader); Una Kay (Jackie); Madelaine Pageau (Beatrice Owen); Mary Walker (Steve); Bob Silverman (Man in Hospital); Monique Belisle (Sheila); Ron Mlodzik (Man Patient); Isabelle Lajeunesse (Waitress); Louise Negin (Maxim); Bob Girolami (Newscaster); Harry Hill (Slasiuk); Kathy Keefler (Interviewer); Marcel Fournier (Cab Driver); Valda Dalton (Car Lady); Murray Smith (Interviewer); Riva Spier (Cecile); Dennis Lacroix (Drunken Indian); Sherman Maness (Indian); Basil Fitzgibbon (Crazy in Plaza).

CREW: The Dibar Syndicate and Dunning/ Link/ Reitman Present *Rabid*. *Special Make-up Design:* Joe Blasco Make-up Associates. *Special Make-up Artist:* Byrd Holland. *Edited by:* Jean Lafleur. *Sound Supervisor:* Dan Goldberg. *Music Supervisor:* Ivan Reitman. *Color:* Eastmancolor. *Art Director:* Claude Marchand. *Director of Photography:* Rene Verzier. *Associate Producers:* Dan Goldberg. *Production Manager:* Don Carmody. *Executive Producers:* Ivan Reitman, Andre Link. *Produced by:* John Dunning. *Written and Directed by:* David Cronenberg. *Second Unit Director:* Jean Lafleur. *Sound Recordist:* Richard Lightstone. *Boom Man:* Jim Thompson. *Wardrobe:* Erla Gliserman. *Wardrobe Assistant:* Carlyne Roberts. *Key Make-up:* Mireilla Recton. *Make-up Assistant:* Heather Allan. *Miss Chambers' Hair by:* John of Le Pavillon. *First Assistant Director:* John Fretz. *Second Assistant Director:* Phil Desjardins. *Stunts:* Fournier Frères Cascadeurs. *First Assistant Camera:* Denis Gingras. *Second Assistant Camera:* Jean-Jacques Gervais. *Property Master:* John Larigne. *Property Assistant:* Andrew Daskin. *Special Effects:* Al Griswold. *Assistant Special Effects:* Joe Etzner. *Assistant Editor:* Debbie Karjala. *Assistant Sound Editor:* Patrick Dodd. *Sound Assistant:* Len Blum. *Second Unit Cameraman:* Louyis D'Ernststead. *Assistant Production Manager:* Sarah Dundas. *Casting*

and Second Unit Make-up: Sharron Wall. Continuity: Tanya Mahiloff. Special Make-up Effects Assistant: Kathy Flynn. Wrangler: Claude Moreau. Set Construction: Romeo Turcette. Post-sync Recording: Austin Grimaldi. Re-recording: Joe Grimaldi. Medical Technical Advisor: Susan Thompson.

SYNOPSIS: Near the self-contained plastic surgery and rehab community called the Keloid Clinic, two motorcyclists—Rose and Hart—are in a terrible accident with a van. An ambulance takes them to emergency surgery, but the clinic is the closest medical establishment. Hart has only a broken hand, but Rose has sustained more serious injuries and undergoes a life-threatening surgery. She is given a special experimental procedure by Dr. Keloid, a strange skin graft. Though Hart is released in a few days, Rose is kept in intensive care for a month.

When Rose awakens, she finds that she has a strange vaginal-like growth in her underarm. She is also strangely hungry, and she uses the odd growth—which extends a strange phallic, organic implement—to drink the blood of a hospital visitor. She has no recollection of the experience, but flees the clinic. On her own, Rose stops at a barn and assaults another stranger in the same bizarre fashion. Then she calls Hart and tells him to come get her. She returns to the clinic and attacks Dr. Keloid, draining his blood through the strange phallic/vaginal sucker in her underarm.

All those who are attacked in this fashion develop a strange form of rabies, foaming at the mouth, becoming insane, and passing on the disease. Dr. Keloid goes rabid as Rose infects a trucker and makes for her home. She arrives at her apartment to the welcome of her roommate, even as the rabies infection spreads across the countryside. Unable to satisfy her hunger, Rose goes to the nude strips by night and infects more people at a triple X movie theater.

Martial law is declared in Montreal as the epidemic rages. Desperate for more blood, Rose kills her roommate. Hart realizes that Rose is the key transmitter of the plague, and she pushes him down a flight of stairs. She spares him the infection and flees while he is unconscious. Then Rose conducts an experiment, remembering Hart's belief that she is the cause of all the sickness. She drains a

man to see if it is true. She discovers it is indeed true when one of her own progeny goes rabid and kills her.

The epidemic worsens ... as garbage trucks cover Montreal to clean up the human waste...

COMMENTARY: As its title suggests, *Rabid* is a distinctly unpleasant horror movie. It is an inferior remake of *Shivers* in some senses, beginning in an enclosed environment (like the Star Liner Towers of *Shivers*), and then moving out to Montreal for a “zombie”-style plague which sees characters foaming at the mouth and passing a deadly, rabies-like plague via sexual contact. There is much over-the-top violence (including the mowing down of Santa Claus in a mall...), and Cronenberg’s requisite dislike of science and scientists (responsible for the plague) is on view. There is another stab at women as “carriers” of sexual disease in *Rabid*, with a denouement that equates promiscuous women with “garbage.” All in all, there’s very little to like or enjoy here, though the avid Cronenberg aficionado will be rewarded with plenty of touches typical of this beloved director. As is usual in Cronenberg’s early filmic efforts, there is a deep and unsettling fear of sex at work in *Rabid*, but here it feels kind of ugly and derivative rather than stimulating, like rancid leftovers from the superior *Shivers*.

Watching *Rabid*, one gets the feeling that the film was made by someone who is deeply confused, frightened and troubled by human sexuality. That’s not a problem, as Cronenberg has done brilliant work on the subject in everything from *Videodrome* (1983) and *Dead Ringers* (1988) to *Existenz* (1999). He is consistently thoughtful and provocative on the subject, and there is always an intellectual joy about his films: they probe the unpleasant and dark corners of human sexuality that are often troubling to contemplate. But frankly, *Rabid* doesn’t feel as worthwhile as his other efforts because Rose, the film’s central character, is not examined in any meaningful human dimension. Is she conscious of what she’s become, and what she is doing to others? The film doesn’t let the audience in on her feelings very much, and she emerges as a sort of big, blank Typhoid Mary, spreading death with little emotion or compunction. She seduces men at a nudie theater and a mall, but is she conscious that she is killing them at the same time she is

“feeding the beast”? Is she possessed by the growth inside her, or is she still in control of her actions? It isn’t clear, and perhaps (former porno star) Marilyn Chambers is not a good enough actress for so important a role.

The film might have been more powerful and more meaningful if Rose were seen to react with either disgust or joy at her escapades. At the end of the film she learns that she is the carrier of death, but still she is rather blank and vacant about it. Perhaps that is why, in the end, she is just carried out with the rest of the trash, a promiscuous woman who spreads disease through indiscriminate sexual contact. Morals don’t seem to enter her frame of reference, or the film’s for that matter. We learn nothing from Rose’s experience, and when her life ends so anonymously there is no sense of loss, tragedy, or vindication.

Rabid is also unsuccessful in its larger plot: the clampdown of martial law during a crisis. This plot has been utilized to better effect in other films, notably the cinema of George Romero in works such as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Crazies*, and its placement in *Rabid* feels rote. By this point in horror cinema, one expects the military to be inept, stupid and incapable of controlling these “plague”-like threats, and *Rabid* doesn’t stray from the party line in its contemplation. Military: bad. Science: bad. Casual sex: bad. It’s all a little too predictable and repetitive for a director of Cronenberg’s intelligence.

Ruby (1977) *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Piper Laurie (Ruby Claire); Stuart Whitman (Vince Kemper); Roger Davis (Dr. Keller); Janit Baldwin (Leslie Claire); Sal Vecchio (Nicky); Paul Kent (Louie); Len Lesser (Barney); Crystin Sindaire (Lila June); Jack Perkins (Avery); Edward Donno (Jess); Fred Kohler (Jake); Rory Stevens (Donny); Raymond Kark (First Man); Jan Burrell (First Woman); Kip Gillespie (Herbie); Tamar Cooper (Woman “A”); Patricia Allison (Pick-up Man’s

Wife); Stu Olson (Man "A"); Mary Robinson (Sheriff's Wife); Michael Alldredge (Sheriff's Wife's Date).

CREW: Dimension Pictures Presents a Steve Krantz Production, *Ruby*. *Executive Producer:* Steve Krantz. *Film Editor:* Bill Magee. *In Charge of Production:* Brice Mack. *Original Music Conducted and Composed by:* Don Ellis. *Story:* Steve Krantz. *Screenplay:* George Edwards, Barry Schneider. *Producer:* George Edwards. *Director of Photography:* William Mendenhall. *Production Supervisor:* Frank Beetson. *Sound Effects:* Lorane Mitchell, Fred Brown. *Music Editor:* Joan Biel. *Production Manager:* Penny L. Vaughn. *Production Coordinator:* Elizabeth A. Shipman. *Location Manager:* John W. Swain III. *Production Assistant:* Tony Crechales. *Second Assistant Director:* Walter Donahue. *Casting:* Harriet B. Helberg. *Assistant Cameraman:* David O. Trainor. *Sound Mixer:* Bill Kaplan. *Boom Operator:* Earl Sampson. *Script Supervisor:* Betty Goldberg. *Art Director/Costume Designer:* Tom Rasmussen. *Set Decorator:* Charles D. Tomlinson. *Set Assistant:* Jim Weatherwax, Michael Dale. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Sherrie R. Norris. *Make-up/Hair Stylist:* Jeffrey B. Angell, Cid Urratia. *Make-up Consultant:* Joe Blasco, Make Up Center. *Property Man:* Richard Karie. *Assistant Property Man:* Alfred Shelly. *Special Effects:* Knott Ltd. *Assistant Special Effects:* Alfred Shelly. *Stunts:* Edward Donno, Alfred Shelly, Jackson B. Johnson. *Lyrics to "Ruby" by:* Don Dunn. *Song Sung by:* Don Dunn. *Lyrics to "Love's So Easy" by:* Sally Stevens. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

NOTE: The video print lists no director for *Ruby*, though the box lists Alan Smithee, the ubiquitous pseudonym of directors who do not wish to be identified. Industry scuttlebutt at the time of the film's release indicated that Curtis Harrington

commenced the film as director and was replaced at some point.

SYNOPSIS: In Florida in 1935, the Dade gangsters, led by Jake Miller, kill one of their own, Nicki, leaving behind a shattered, pregnant lover named Ruby Claire. That very night, Ruby gives birth to a baby daughter, Leslie.

Sixteen years later, Ruby runs a drive-in movie theater at the old Road-House club and has hired many ex-gang members as theater employees. One night, while *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* is screened, the projectionist is besieged by poltergeists and hanged. When viewers start to protest an interruption in the film projection, Ruby finds the projectionist, Jess, dead. Another drive-in employee is killed near the swamp on the same night, after stealing jewelry from Ruby's house and giving it to the local slut, Lila Jane. The sheriff gets wind of the hanging, but feels hamstrung because he has long had "an arrangement" with Ruby and the gangsters at the club. He minds his own business ... for a small price, of course.

Meanwhile, Ruby comes to believe that her long-dead lover, Nicky, has returned from the grave to kill those people who wronged him. Though she claims to have loved Nicky, Ruby was part of the set-up that killed him. Hoping to evade the authorities, Ruby and her new boyfriend, Vince, throw the two corpses in the swamp.

Vince asks Dr. Keller, a parapsychologist, to come to the theater and figure out the truth about Nicky's spirit. Keller detects strange, powerful forces at work. Keller also says that the forces center on Leslie, Ruby's mute daughter. When Keller starts to speak in Nicky's voice and then attacks Ruby, Keller theorizes that Leslie is a natural medium who evoked the real ... and evil ... presence of her dead father when she became fearful that Ruby would send her away to a mental hospital. Keller attempts to hypnotize Leslie, trying to preserve her identity. This works for a time, but then Nicky re-establishes himself in Leslie, possessing her.

The malevolent, vengeful Nicky, strikes again, attempting to kill Vince. Nicky even manifests himself physically in Leslie, and tries to choke Keller. Ruby comes to realize that only she can give Nicky what he wants. She goes to the swamp, the scene of the crime in

1935, and takes Nicky's hand. They walk together into the swamp ... and an angry skeleton drowns Ruby.

COMMENTARY: A drive-in theater is a great setting for a horror movie, and the low-budget film *Ruby* gets some mileage out of it. Depicting the drive-in as a pit of lust and sex with great 1950s-era cars to boot (and a B-classic, *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*, unspooling on the screen), *Ruby* has the seeds of promise in it. But very soon, the film grows incomprehensible and becomes a mess of elements that fail to generate interest.

Original director Curtis Harrington was reportedly fired from the film and that may be part of the reason the film is so bad. It looks patched together and made in contrasting styles. There's an old saying that too many cooks spoil the broth, and that seems true of this picture. A mute daughter, a past-it showgirl with a secret, aging gangsters, a vengeful spirit, a haunted drive-in, and a parapsychologist exorcist all combine to create nothing more enticing than a bona fide cinematic mess. *Exorcist*-style effects are employed—*down to the levitating girl over the bed*—but without much impact, since all the characters are so sketchy. Worse, each performer seems to mouth his or her dialogue in an all-encompassing cone of silence without comprehending or listening to the responses of the other *dramatis personae*. The characters don't answer each other's questions, and they all talk about things and events the movie never cares to explain. Thus, in *Ruby*, the audience feels totally shut out. This may be less because the story is bad than because the editing is incompetent.

Yet still, somewhere, one senses this story might have been a decent picture. It features the crime from the past (an element that worked in *J.D.'s Revenge* and *Halloween* to name but two), a grand dame of horror in Piper Laurie, and a locale that could have been really fun (even if it is improbable that a drive-in would be built so close to a swamp...). It's just a shame to squander it on a story told so lackadaisically.

For every element that could have made *Ruby* work, there is another that sinks the narrative. For instance, there is a voice-over narration near the start of the film that tells the audience what is happening. The voice-over is not classy, interesting or artistic, but

wholly necessary because the film is cut in such a way as to be incoherent. The voice-over is a last ditch attempt to salvage the unsalvageable. There is also bad, unfunny humor at the theater as over-the-hill gangsters run a concession stand and gawk at passing chicks. It makes one long for the redneck humor of *The Crater Lake Monster*! Even the climax, in which Ruby is dragged into the swamp by Nicky's skeleton, seems more inept than scary. It all amounts to the longest 80 minutes of your life, with only Stuart Whitman maintaining a modicum of professionalism.

Piper Laurie made this after *Carrie*? The mind boggles...

***The Sentinel* (1977) * * ½**

Critical Reception

"...a crude and obvious imitation of *Rosemary's Baby*, but much creepier and more bizarre. The unnerving ending obliterates the memory of the rest of the film ... makes good use of several past-their-prime actors in small roles, but all attempts at psychological insight, subtlety, or believability fall flat. The great special effects at the end justify the film's faults, however."—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 86.

"The confrontations are supposed to be terrifying but the most they offer is some mild creepiness.... Mr. Winner has sweetened the mess with some nudity, a little masturbation and a dash of lesbianism."—Richard Eder, *New York Times*, February 12, 1977, page 12.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Chris Sarandon (Lerman); Cristina Raines (Alison Parker); Martin Balsam (Professor Ruzinsky); John Carradine (Father Halliran); Jose Ferrer (Robed Figure); Ava Gardner (Miss Logan);

Arthur Kennedy (Monsignor Franchino); Burgess Meredith (Charles Chazen); Sylvia Miles (Gerde); Deborah Raffin (Jennifer); Eli Wallach (Detective Gatz); Christopher Walken (Rizzo); Beverly D'Angelo (Sandra); Hank Garret (Brenner); Robert Gerringer (Hart); Nana Tucker (Girl at End); William Hickey (Perry); Gary Allen (Malcolm Stinnett); Jerry Orbach (Film Director); Tom Berenger (Man at End); Tresa Hughes (Rebecca Stinnett); Kate Harrington (Mrs. Clark); Jane Hoffman (Lillian Clotkin); Elaine Shore (Emma Clotkin); Sam Gray (Dr. Aureton); Reid Shelton (Priest); Fred Stuthman (Alison's father); Lucie Lancaster (Alison's Mother); Anthony Holland (Party Host); Jeff Goldblum (Jack); Zane Lasky (Raymond); Mady Heflin (Professor's Student); Diane Stillwell (Brenner's secretary); Ron McLarty (Real Estate Agent).

CREW: Universal Studios Presents a Michael Winner film, *The Sentinel*. *Set Decorator:* Ed Stewart. *Unit Production Manager:* Bob Grand. *Second Assistant Director:* Larry Albucher, Ralph Singleton. *Sound Recordist:* Les Lazarowitz. *Sound Editor:* Ted Mason. *Dialogue Editor:* Russ Hill. *Film Editors:* Bernard Gibble, Terence Rawlings. *Special Make-up:* Dick Smith, Bob Laden. *Hairstylist:* Bill Farley. *Costumes:* Peggy Farrell. *Music Editor:* Dan Blake. *Casting:* Cis Corman. *First Assistant Director:* Charles Okun. *Production Designer:* Philip Rosenberg. *Special Visual Effects:* Albert Whitlock. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Gil Melle. *Director of Photography:* Dick Kratina. *Based on a novel by:* Jeffrey Konvitz. *Screenplay by:* Michael Winner. *Produced by:* Michael Winner, Jeffrey Konvitz. *Directed by:* Michael Winner. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Color:* Technicolor. *Titles:* National Screen Service, Ltd. Produced in Association with Jeffrey Konvitz Productions, Inc. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 91 minutes.

“When I first read it, I thought it had a chance of being a first-rate picture. I liked the book a lot ... but I had no fun making it.... It was the only picture I’ve done that I felt was not a success on any level, personally or professionally”³⁵.—star Chris Sarandon expresses dissatisfaction with *The Sentinel* (1977).

SYNOPSIS: A beautiful model, Alison, searches for an apartment in New York City, unaware she is being trailed by a priest. Later, she debates marriage with her boyfriend, Michael, a shady attorney who is believed to have murdered his wife. Alison soon gets word that her father has passed away. This brings back troubling memories for Alison, including a time she caught her father in an orgy with several women, after which she attempted to commit suicide.

Alison returns to the city and visits an old Brooklyn apartment house. Mrs. Logan, her real estate agent, shows her the place. It is fully furnished, only \$400 a month, and a blind priest, Father Hallarin, lives in the apartment upstairs. Alison takes the apartment and moves in. She soon meets her neighbor in 4B, Mr. Chazen, a man with many cats. She also meets the two strange ladies, lesbians, from downstairs. Alison is disturbed when one of them masturbates in front of her. Then, on a commercial shoot, Alison is struck with blinding headaches and is told to consult a neurologist.

Mr. Chazen throws a welcoming party for Alison and introduces her to the rest of the building’s motley denizens. Later Alison hears noises in a vacant apartment and reports it to Mrs. Logan. Logan is shocked because, according to her, no one lives in the building except Alison and Father Hallarin. Mr. Chazen and the others haven’t lived there for years! Suspicious, Alison returns to her friends’ apartments and finds the suites neglected, vacant. Concerned about Alison, Michael asks a private investigator, James Brenner, to look in on her.

That night, Alison visits a vacant apartment and is confronted by the ghoulish person of her dead father. She stabs at him in the face

and flees into the night. She is taken to the hospital where it is learned that one of her “imagined” neighbors is Anna Clark, a murderess who went to the electric chair for chopping up her boyfriend with an axe. When Brenner turns up dead, the police believe Alison is guilty of the crime.

Alison goes to church and meets the priest who has been secretly trailing her. He tells her to embrace Christ, that the Lord has a purpose for her. When she returns to her apartment, Michael quizzes her and is shocked to learn that she reads Latin phrases in every book he pulls off the shelf. Michael tries to interview Father Hallarin upstairs, but can’t get into the apartment. Researching further, Michael investigates Hallarin’s history with the church. Before becoming a priest, he attempted suicide, just like Alison did. And, his blindness came on suddenly. Breaking into the church archives, Michael finds a file on Alison and sees that she is next in line for similar treatment. The files give a date: Alison will become “Sister Theresa” the very next day!

Michael investigates the apartment in Brooklyn Heights and learns that behind a panel in the basement there is an inscription. It indicates that the apartment building is built on the portal to Hell. Father Hallarin confirms this fact, and in a fit of rage, Michael kills the father ... and then is himself killed by something in the dark.

Alison returns to the apartment and finds Michael there. He tells her she is to be the next sentinel, the watcher who gazes over the gateway to damnation. He should know: he is now one of the damned, and wants her to commit suicide so that souls condemned to Hell can escape. Many dead souls, including Alison’s father, attempt to drive Alison to insanity as she flees to Hallarin’s apartment. As evil surrounds her, Alison receives the heavenly strength she needs. She takes Father Hallarin’s cross and becomes the next sentinel ... a blind “Sister Theresa” looking out over the City and the gates of hell.

With Alison entrenched as the new gatekeeper, the damned, including Michael (who really did murder his wife...), are forced back to Hell and everlasting torment.

COMMENTARY: *The Sentinel* follows closely in the school of *The*

Exorcist (1973) and *The Omen* (1976). It sets forth a conspiracy in the Church, a kind of possession by evil, the corruption of the innocent, and other common elements of 1970s Hollywood supernatural flicks. *The Sentinel* is not as powerful a film as either *The Omen* or *The Exorcist*, but it does feature some startling moments and is a solid horror film despite an overload of clichés. The film's greatest power comes in its jolting, surprise revelations. For the most part, these shocks truly catch even the attentive viewer off guard, and maintain an interest in the narrative, even considering the preponderance of genre dreck.

One of *The Sentinel*'s best horrific moments arrives mid-way through the plot, when a troubled Alison, alone in her apartment, is confronted with the silhouette of a ghoul who happens to be her deceased father. This corpse is a gray, half-naked monstrosity in the corner of a dark room, and Alison stabs at him with a knife. Shockingly, her attack cuts the tip off her father's nose, and slices through his eyeball! The movie doesn't shy away from the gruesome after-effect of Alison's thrust, and it is a frightening, shocking sequence with exquisite make-up (thanks to Dick Smith.) The old man's glazed white eyes, wild gray hair, and strange manner of movement all contribute to the scene's power and sense of "unreality." The gory result of the knife attack is even more unexpected and disturbing ... much more explicit than the bloodletting in *The Exorcist*.

Another surprise is also cleverly orchestrated. Michael (Chris Sarandon) dies late in the picture and is cast down to Hell, but the audience is unaware of this situation. Thus, when Chris re-appears in Alison's apartment at the denouement of the picture, it is a shock to learn that he is dead and converted wholly to evil. Though the movie makes a point to indicate Michael is not that nice a guy (he had his wife murdered...), very few viewers will be ready for the moment when it is revealed he has been relegated to Hell and is no different from Mr. Chazen or the building's other strange denizens. It's a "trick" moment that gives the film's final sequence quite a boost. Though some reviewers have complained about this climactic set piece (which utilizes "real life" deformed human beings as Hell's ghouls), it is no doubt the strongest in the film. The idea of physical deformity equating with spiritual deformity (i.e. "evil") is one of

The Sentinel's more powerful conceits.

The Sentinel is also half-way interesting in its presentation of the notion of "redemption." The film indicates that a fallen person (like Alison) can find a second chance at salvation, but only in literally serving the will of God. Alison, who attempted to commit suicide, is "saved," but only at a cost. For the rest of her natural life, she will guard the portal to Hell around the clock. This is a unique and troubling notion, because usually in Christianity "forgiveness" is granted when it is asked for. In *The Sentinel*, God forgives all right, but asks for something in return too: duty and service, and much more than a day job. Unfortunately, the film skirts around the issue rather than dealing with it straight, even though the situation raises some questions. Does Alison have free will? Did God create her to be his sentinel, and if so, did he also not create within her the will to commit suicide? If so, wasn't she really tricked into a pre-ordained fate? This plot point is a facet of *The Sentinel* that could have been explored more fully, but grants the picture a sense of order. The core of the picture seems to indicate that the Lord has a purpose for all his creations, even for those who question and fail in some way. The right questions are raised, but *The Sentinel* would have been stronger if it had given some indication that it knew it was asking them.

The Sentinel is also littered with clichés from the 1970s horror highway. Burgess Meredith appears here to reprise his nutball role from *Burnt Offerings* (1976). An early scene in the film involves Sarandon and Raines bicycling in Central Park and it is filmed in such a familiar way that one fears these characters will run into the family from *Audrey Rose*, a film that also featured an identical scene of "idyllic" Central Park. There are also references in this film to masturbation, which surrounds one of the key "shock" moments of *The Exorcist*. And the conspiracy of the Church also seems similar to the conspiracy of priests in *The Omen*, only it is a lot less clear. Has the Church known about the sentinel and the gates of Hell all along? How did the portal come to open up in New York City? Why has the Church never acknowledged so important a symbol of Christian faith? It seems that if the Church had proof of such a portal, it would organize tours of the damned place 24 hours a day. Imagine how many more people would convert to Christianity if

given hard evidence (like a portal...) of eternal damnation? It makes much less sense to keep such a portal a secret...

The Sentinel is not an adroit or particularly artistic horror film, and Raines is only moderately expressive as the film's lead, but overall this is an entertaining and occasionally scary horror entry. The last twenty minutes are the film's strongest, and far creepier than anything imagined in the pit of clichés that precede the climax.

***Suspiria* (1977) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“Shooting on bold, very fake-looking sets, [the director] uses bright primary colors and stark lines to create a campy, surreal atmosphere, and his distorted camera angles and crazy lighting turn out to be much more memorable than the carnage.”—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*, August 13, 1977, page 11.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jessica Harper (Susie Banyon); Udo Kier (Frank Mandell); Alida Valli (Miss Tanner); Stefania Casini, Flavio Bucel, Miguel Bose, Barbara Magnolfi, Susanna Javicoli, Eva Axen, Rudolf Schundler, Joan Bennett; Supporting Cast: Margherita Horowitz, Jacopo Mariani, Fulvio Mingozzi, Franca Scagnetti, Renato Scarpa, Serafina Scocrcelletti, Giuseppe Transocchi, Renata Zamengo; Dancers: Alessandra Capozzi, Salvatore Capozzi, Diana Ferrana, Cristina Latini, Alfredo Raino, Claudia Zacari.

CREW: Salvatore Argento Presents a film by Dario Argento, *Suspiria*. *Director of Photography:* Luciana Tavoli. *Production Designer:* Giuseppe Cassan. *Costumes:* Pierangel Acoletti. *Film Editor:* Franco Fraticelli. *Production Manager:* Lucio Trentini.

Producer: Claudio Argento. *Written by:* Dario Argento, Daria Nicolodi. *Music:* the Goblins, with the Collaboration of Dario Argento. *Directed by:* Dario Argento. *Recorded in English at:* International Recording, Rome. *Dubbing Editor:* Nick Alexander. *Unit Manager:* Federico Tocci. *Production Coordinator:* Federico Starace, Massimo Brandimante. *Assistant Director:* Antonio Gabrielli. *Script Continuity:* Francesca Roberti. *Camera Operator:* Idelmo Simonelli. *Assistant Camera Operators:* Giuseppe Tinelli, Enrico Fontana, Riccardo Dolci. *Action Stills:* Francesco Bellamo. *First Assistant Editor:* Piero Bozza. *Second Assistant Editor:* Roberto Olivieri. *Sound Recordist:* Mario Dallimonti. *Boom Operator:* Corrado Volpicelli. *Re-recording Engin eer:* Federica Savina. *Make-up:* Pierantonio Mecacci. *Hair stylist:* Maria Teresa Corridoni. *Assistant Art Director:* Maurizio Garrone, David Bassan. *Set Dresser:* Enrico Fiorentini. *Special Effects:* Germano Natali. *Set Furnishings:* G.R.P—Rancati—Cimino D'Angelo—F.R.A.—Spa. Filmed in Eastman Color, and in Technicolor and Technivision. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A young dancer from New York, Susie Banyon, moves to Italy to attend the exclusive Tamm Academy of Dance. Susie arrives at the school during a terrible storm and is refused admittance. At the same time, another girl, Pat Hingle, exits from it rapidly. She mumbles something about “secrets” and an “iris,” and then disappears into the rain. Later that night, Pat seeks sanctuary at a friend’s apartment, but is murdered in grotesque fashion by some hairy monstrosity that hovers malevolently outside her window.

The next morning, Susie returns to the school and is mysteriously allowed in with no further delays. She attends her classes and befriends a girl named Sarah. Soon, Susie suspects that things are not right at the school. There is a hulking Romanian handyman on the grounds, and a frightening-looking woman is often in evidence

stalking the hallways. Worst of all is Mrs. Tanner, the harsh dance instructor. One day, Susie feels ill, but Mrs. Tanner makes her dance anyway. As a result, Susie faints and bleeds from her nose and mouth.

Soon after her recovery, Susie is terrified when maggots drop from the ceiling vent in her room! This grotesque scene is repeated as maggots drop down in all the student dorms, forcing a reshuffling of sleeping arrangements. Although the cause of the maggot infestation is located (a crate of rotten food in the attic is the culprit), Susie is more interested in the bizarre person who beds down opposite her in the dance room that night, just beyond a hanging sheet. This strange figure breathes heavily, and seems immensely old...

Sarah and Susie soon become convinced the teachers do not actually leave the academy at night. Instead, they ascend a secret staircase and disappear somewhere upstairs. One night, when Susie has been mysteriously drugged and is unresponsive, Sarah follows the secret passageway into the darkness. Once upstairs, she is tracked by the lunatic who killed Pat, and meets a painful demise in a room filled with barbed wire.

Later, Susie is upset by Sarah's absence. The authorities at the school claim the girl simply got up one morning and left, but this does not seem at all likely to Susie. She contacts a friend of Sarah's, Frank Mandell, at a local convention center. He is a psychiatrist who once treated Sarah for a nervous breakdown, and now reveals the interesting history of the Tamm Academy. It seems the school was formed in 1895 by a Greek woman termed the "Black Queen." This woman, Helena Marcos, was the leader of a witch coven. She was rumored to be quite powerful, but reportedly died in a fire in 1905, and the school was taken over by the Black Queen's favorite pupil. Mandell also informs Sarah that a coven can only be stopped by the murder of its leader. If the leader dies, the others follow suit.

Determined to discover Sarah's fate, Susie takes the secret passageway upstairs one lonely night, when the rest of the school's pupils have left. She remembers Pat's words about "secrets" and "irises" and gains entrance to another secret realm by twisting a hidden door handle that resembles a blue iris. Inside, Susie

stumbles on the coven and learns that all of her teachers are witches in service of the still-living Black Queen. After being discovered, Susie retreats into a dark bedroom and hears the same awful snoring she heard that night in the dance room. She is alone in the room with Helena Marcos!

When Susie tries to kill the witch, Marcos becomes invisible and strikes back. Fighting the forces of evil in their own lair, Susie manages to kill the Black Queen by jabbing a shard of broken glass into her heart just as lightning illuminates the invisible witch's position in the room. Weakened by the death of their leader, the rest of the coven expires ... dying as if stabbed in the same place as the evil Helena Marcos.

COMMENTARY: Director Dario Argento has legions of admirers in horror film circles, and one need look no further than *Suspiria* to understand why. Those seeking a “realistic” horror film will want to go elsewhere, but those who cherish a more surreal, dream-like approach to genre material—an approach in which evil seems to pervade every corner of the frame—will admire Argento’s talent in creating so unnerving a celluloid world. Simply stated, this is a terrifying film that seems to exist on a different plane of reality than any other genre effort in the 70s. *Suspiria* is gory, garish, over-the-top, and it plays on the subconscious in unexpected and effective ways.

John Carpenter deploys his slow-moving camera and foreground “jolts” to create terror in such films as *Halloween* (1978), *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) and *The Fog* (1980). George Romero utilizes frenzied editing to grant *The Crazies* (1972) and *Jack’s Wife* (1972) a sense of hysteria and heightened pace. David Cronenberg constantly revisits the theme of twisted human sexuality in *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977) and the rest. Like these horror maestros, Argento works within his own unique approach, trading on color and recurring imagery to make his impact. Accordingly, each and every frame of *Suspiria* is composed with an artistic, remarkable attention to color.

When Susie Banyon arrives in Italy, and takes a cab to the Tamm School of Dance, light and shadows play on her face during the ride. This is a long and unnerving scene that sets up the twin motifs

of *Suspiria*: color and water. Rain crashes down on the cab and blue light illuminates Susie's face during the storm. It is a deep, unreal blue that doesn't exist in nature; that could only exist in *supernature*. And that, no doubt, is Argento's point. In approaching the school where witches reign, Susie has crossed over from the realm of the normal to the supernormal. She has transitioned from traditional reality to something quite different. Accordingly, the rest of the film, affected by the coven's power, is bathed in deep reds, powerful blues, and overlapping unnatural color schemes. It is a luridly colored world, not unlike a comic book, but it perfectly reflects the sort of "unreal" world of the Tamm School.

Later in the film, the dormitory is bathed in an orange glow, and the room looks like the slumber party from Hell as strange shadows move mysteriously behind suspended blankets. These colors are so wrong to the eye, so beyond the pale, that the audience reaction is one of instinctive, visceral dismay. This is a place of evil, and the bold lighting is a constant reminder that something "wrong" is overshadowing the characters.

Water is likewise used to generate "running" discomfort throughout *Suspiria*. This reviewer sensed that the multiple shots of running water (including a toilet flush, rain, a sink drain, a sewer and so forth), also functioned as a metaphor for the witches. Both the witches (described as malefic, negative and destructive) and the running water are elemental forces: unstoppable, unrelenting, part of our world's very structure. Both are inescapable. On a much more basic level, we've all heard of "Chinese water torture," in which the dripping of water eventually drives a victim crazy. It is not hard to see in *Suspiria* how the constantly running water builds up a tension in the viewer, like that. There are so many shots of water in the film that again, one is unnerved.

On a much more basic level, water is often associated with women. When ready to give birth, a woman's water "breaks." Women also bleed menstrual blood, and mothers provide milk to their young. These are all forms of a running fluid associated with women, and not surprisingly, the evil witches in *Suspiria* are female. The running water, and the rain in the storm, may be seen as a side effect of their very power, their control of the environment around them.

Beyond his exquisite use of color and water, Argento reveals in *Suspiria* that he has no compunction about going far beyond horror film norms. He stages outrageous, over-the-top, even operatic, death scenes. These sequences are so hardcore that some fans will turn away in disgust, but the end result is that Argento has his audience where he wants them. He deploys violence so outrageously in his early sequences that audiences are left breathless, and fearful at what the director will do to top himself. Take for example the brutal murder that opens the film. A young girl sees a monstrous (and unexpected) face gazing out at her from beyond a window. The monster stabs her once, twice, three times, and so on, and there is a close-up of a knife puncturing the girl's heart. It is bloody, and disgusting, and the scene isn't even half-finished. The girl falls through a glass roof, and is hanged, while her friend is sliced to ribbons by a falling glass shard. It is some kind of masterpiece of the disgusting, and Argento shows *everything*. Some horror fans may feel that the Val Lewton approach of "suggesting" violence is more powerful than Argento's point-blank, head-on approach, but if the point is to scare the audience, than Argento has succeeded.

Sarah's death scene is another masterpiece of gore and suspense. The poor girl has discovered the coven in a secret upstairs passageway, and tries to reach a high window that will offer her escape to an adjoining room. A killer is on the far side of the door trying to get in as the girl desperately builds a tower of crates to reach the window, and hence escape. After much suspense, she lands on the opposite side of the window but—*bizarrely*—in a room of coiled barbed wire. She is unable to escape this trap, and the killer slits her throat in monstrous close-up. On a fundamental level, this death scene makes no sense. Why store coiled barbed wire right under a window in a coven's headquarters? On another level, it is a terrifying scene because there is a sense of inevitability to it. Sarah cannot escape, no matter what, and so lands in barbed wire that—by all rights—shouldn't be there! This is a film suffused with evil, and Argento wants his audience to understand that something unseen and evil is in control, aware of everything that transpires. *Suspiria* has no logic, except the internal logic of a nightmare, and his outrageous death scenes only barely encompass our sense of reality, existing instead on a different plane of paranoid reality. It's different from what Americans have been trained to expect in

horror films, but nothing short of genius.

In addition to his strange, overlapping lighting scheme and focus on gore, Argento populates his film with nightmarish characters that skirt the periphery of the plot. There is the manservant with bad gingivitis, and then there is the blind piano player who meets a terrible end in another frightening set piece. All of these characters exist primarily for their visual impact, as they contribute little to the telling of the story. It's almost as if *Suspiria* is a horror painting more than a horror movie because it tells its outrageous tale in colors and images rather than in words, verse, or conventional logic. Argento's gift is that he can make furniture in the dark seem frightening, and that his images (such as maggots falling from a ceiling vent...) nurture an overall feeling of horror rather than one that works coherently and logically within a sequence or narrative. His thesis is that the witches control this reality, and thus he has no need to conform to the moviegoer's sense of logic or what should or shouldn't happen. He is free to experiment, and he does so.

In concept and design, *Suspiria* is a complete original, one of the decade's great horror films. It doesn't make sense, and if taken literally, the story of the witch coven could play like something out of a Nancy Drew novel, only with a pulse-pound electronic soundtrack. But, revealing his mastery of film technique, Argento constructs a terrifying visual world around that story, where color, where light, where water, where brutal death all overlap in unnerving ways. For Argento, his audience, and for *Suspiria*, reality isn't what it used to be.

Tentacles

Cast & Crew

CAST: Shelley Winters (Tillie Turner); John Huston (Ned Turner); Bo Hopkins (Will Gleason); Henry Fonda (Mr. Whitehead); Cesar Danova (John Corey).

CREW: *Directed and Produced by:* Ovidio G. Assonitis. *Screenplay by:* Steven W. Carabatsos and

Tito Carpi. *Director of Photography*: Roberto Piazzolli. *Music*: Stelvio Cipriani. *Film Editor*: A.J. Curi. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 102 minutes.

DETAILS: An Italian-made *Jaws* rip-off. This time, a giant mutant octopus threatens a sailboat race, and a scientist (Huston) wonders if “science gone awry” is behind the creature’s unnatural growth.

Tintorera—Tiger Shark

Cast & Crew

CAST: Susan George (Gabriella); Hugo Stiglitz (Stefan); Andres Garcia (Miguel); Fiona Lewis (Patricia); Jennier Ashley (Kelly); Priscilla Barnes (Girl in Bar).

CREW: *Directed by*: Rene Cardona, Jr. *Produced by*: Geraldine Green. *Screenplay by*: Rene Cardona and Ramon Bravo. *Director of Photography*: Ramon Bravo. *Music*: Basil Poledouris. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 90 minutes.

DETAILS: In Mexico, two men (Stiglitz and Garcia) hook up with a beautiful and sexy woman (George). But fun time is over when a menacing tiger shark begins to feed on scantily-clad female bathers in the area. The two men resolve to hunt down the shark, in yet another illegitimate child of *Jaws*.

1978

Bog (1978) *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Gloria De Haven (Ginny Glenn/Adrianna); Aldo Ray (Sheriff Neal Rydholm); Marshall

Thompson (Dr. Brad Wednesday); Leo Gordon (Dr. John); Ed Clark (Deputy Jensen); Robert Fry (Wallace Fry); Lou Hunt (Kim Pierce); Jeff Schwaab (the Bog Monster); Carol Terry (May Tanner); Glen Voros (Alan Tanner); Rojay North (Chuck Pierce); Charles Pitts (Deputy Dorbett); Chris Harris (Deputy Siegel); Glen Hopkins (Deputy McQueeney); Pat Hopkins (First Girl on Bike); Janet Paylow (2nd Girl on Bike); Richard Nyguard (Townsmen); Dino Stroppa (Potter the Preacher).

CREW: Marshall Films Presents *Bog*. *Executive Vice President of Production:* Jack Willoughby. *Original Screenplay by:* Carl N. Kitt. *Executive Producer:* Clark Paylow. *“Walk with Me” Sung by:* Pat Hopkins. *Music Director:* Bill Walker. *“Walk with Me” Written by:* Don King, Dave Woodward. *Director of Cinematography:* Wings. *Editor:* John Montonaro. *Associate Producer:* Nelson Communications, Inc. *Produced by:* Michelle Marshall. *Directed by:* Don Keesler. *Script Supervisor:* Tiera Bachand. *Assistant Director:* Stuart Grass. *Gaffer:* Robert Petzolat. *Key Grips:* Johnny Black, John Johnson. *Sound Recording:* Tim Turner. *Boom:* John Formanek. *Production Supervisor:* Linda Grant. *Assistant Editor:* Kim Maxwell. *Wardrobe:* Jim Hook. *Make-up Artist:* Erica Veland. *Set Dresser:* Charles Adams. *Graphic Design:* Susan Salomon. *Film Lab Coordinator:* Patti Kitt. *Sound Effects:* Diane Haglund. *Re-recording Mixer:* Bill Reis. *Titles:* Ritter Wasberg. *Special Effects:* Richard Albain, Gerald Winchell. *Color:* Cinema Processors. *Special Electronic Effects:* Hans Wurman. This is a Bog Production in association with Nelson Communications. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 85 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: When a fisherman drops dynamite in a stream, he awakens a prehistoric monster and is subsequently killed by it. Later, two couples drive to the river for a vacation, but the women are agitated that their husbands are drinking. The monster arrives

and kidnaps the women, leaving the husbands to go to the police for help. Local authorities organize a search and find two corpses. Autopsies are conducted and it is learned that the women were drained of blood. Before long, the creature strikes again, killing a deputy.

A local doctor and the town's female coroner go in search of the monster while simultaneously growing attracted to one another. Meanwhile, local authorities bomb Bog Lake, but the explosive charges fail to bring up the monster. The police leave the lake, but hear gunfire and return to learn that the vengeful widowers have been killed by the monster! Strangely, a local witch woman, Adrianna, seems to know more about the monster than anyone else, though she refuses to divulge its secrets.

Before long, the coroner and the doctor determine that the monster is chitinous and composed entirely of cancer cells (!). The monster strikes again, killing two women on bicycles, and police divers go down deep into Bog Lake to kill the monster. They discover egg sacs at the bottom of the lake, and bring them up, but the creature kills them too. Ginny, the coroner, retrieves the eggs, but the monster captures her and attempts to mate with her. The doctor and the sheriff race to save her from this fate worse than death. They fight the monster, and ram it with a police car. The beast from Bog Lake burns up in flames, but not before killing the local sheriff.

COMMENTARY: They don't make movies like *Bog* anymore ... and we can all be grateful for that. This is a monster film made by people with only the most rudimentary knowledge of how to assemble a film. It is poorly acted, shot, written and edited. It also commits the cardinal sin of being boring. In story detail, it is essentially the same film as 1977's *The Crater Lake Monster*, only minus stop-motion photography and redneck humor. Unlike "bad movie" classics such as *The Great Spider Invasion* (1975), the movie doesn't have the advantage of being funny.

Here's a laundry list of complaints about *Bog*. It is incompetently edited, so much so that the film recognizably freeze-frames between shots on several occasions ... at least six times. Worse, one scene near the end of the film commences before Aldo Ray is ready. There is silence in the shot and nobody moves, and then, after a few

seconds, the scene starts and Aldo Ray begins to emote ... unaware the camera has been recording his inaction the whole time.

The plot is really bad, and the dialogue in *Bog* is downright atrocious. In one sequence, two unidentified characters arrive and talk to the sheriff. They say that they're there to do "something" (undefined), and that they don't need "the other guy" (also undefined). It makes no sense. Later, a character named Ben discovers a shoe, picks it up and announces: "A shoe!" Brilliant! An experienced filmmaker understands that the audience will recognize certain things, such as shoes, because film is primarily a visual art. It isn't necessary to show a shoe and announce the presence of the shoe. One or the other would have done just fine.

And the monster of *Bog*? It is a shaggy, phony-looking costume with an insectoid mask/headpiece that wouldn't pass muster at a second-grader's Halloween party.

The main characters? Two over-the-hill professionals well past their prime trying to overcome what is clearly a passionless romance.

The horror? No such thing. For much of the film, the monster is never in the same shot as the victim *du jour*, and shaky P.O.V. close-ups of screaming people substitute for monster-human interaction.

Still, there are some really incredible moments in this film. One scene indicates that the "old hag" of the woods, Adrianna, has mated with the *Bog* monster. An old lady and a scaly fish monster having sexual intercourse ... now that's scary!

***The Boys from Brazil* (1978) * * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Gregory Peck (Dr. Josef Mengela); Laurence Olivier (Ezra Liberman); James Mason (Edward Seibert); Lilli Palmer (Esther Lieberman); Uta Hagen (Frieda Maloney); John Dehner (Henry Wheelock); Rosemary Harris (Mrs. Doring) Anne Meara (Mrs. Curry); John Rubinstein (David Bennett); Denholm Elliott (Sidney Beynon); Steve

Guttenberg (Barry Kohler); David Hurst (Strasser); Jeremy Black (Jack Curry; Simon Harrington; Erich Doring; Bobby Wheelock); Walter Gotell (Mundt); Wolfgang Preiss (Lofquist); Michael Gough (Mr. Harrington); Joachim Hansen (Fsser); Guy Dumont (Hessen); Carl Duering (Traustein); Linda Haydon (Nancy); Richard Marner (Doring); George Marischka (Gunther); Prunella Scales (Mrs. Harrington); Raul Faustino Saldanha (Ismael); Jurgen Anderson (Kleist); Mervyn Nelson (Stroop); David Brandon (Schmidt); Monica Gearson (Gertrud); Wolf Kahler (Scwhwimmer); Gerti Gordon (Berthe).

CREW: Sir Lew Grade Presents a Producer Circle Production. A Franklin J. Schaffner Film, *The Boys from Brazil*. *Director of Photography:* Henri Decae. *Production Designer:* Gil Parrondo. *Costume Designer:* Anthony Mendleson. *Art Director:* Peter Lamont. *Editor:* Robert E. Swink. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Based on the Novel by:* Ira Levin. *Screenplay:* Heywood Gould. *Executive Producer:* Robert Fryer. *Producers:* Martin Richards, Stanley O'Toole. *Directed by:* Franklin J. Schaffner. *Color:* Deluxe. *Film Processed at:* Rank Film Labs Ltd. *Production Supervisor:* Ron Carr. *Location Manager:* Scott Wodehouse. *Second Assistant Director:* Terry Churcher. *Continuity:* Pamela Carlton. *Production Assistant:* Mary Richards, Ann Ford. *Camera Operator:* Jimmy Devis. *Sound Recordist:* Derek Ball. *Construction Manager:* Michael Murchan. *Gaffer:* Jack Coggins. *Special Effects:* Roy Whybrow. *Stuntmen:* Eddie Powell, Denny Powell, Del Baker. *Wardrobe Master:* Richard Pointing. *Wardrobe Mistress:* Rebecca Breed. *Make-up:* Bill Lodge, Christopher Ticker. *Hairdressers:* Patrick Grant, Ronnie Cogan. *Sound Editors:* Edward Rossi, William Hartman, Richard Sperbe. *Assistant Editor:* Dennis Wooley. *Apprentice Editor:* Jenny Schaffner. *Dialogue Editor:* Godfrey Marks. *Music Editor:* Ken

Engel. *Titles and Opticals*: Pacific Title. *Accent Coach*: Marcella Markham. *Song* "We're Home Again," *Music by*: Jerry Goldsmith; *Lyrics by*: Hal Shaper; *Sung by*: Elaine Page. *Orchestrations*: Arthur Morton. Music recorded at Anvil Films and Record Corp Ltd. Made on location in Portugal, the U.S., England and Austria. Re-recorded at 20th Century-Fox Studios, Hollywood. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 127 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In contemporary Paraguay, an aggressive Jewish investigator, Barry Kohler, photographs the arrival of Dr. Josef Mengela and other Nazi sympathizers. He sends photos of the gathering to Ezra Lieberman, a famous but cynical Nazi hunter. Lieberman instructs Kohler to leave Paraguay before he gets in trouble, but Kohler persists in spying on the Nazis. At one gathering, Kohler overhears a terrifying plan: Mengela authorizes his lackeys to kill 94 men, all 65-year-old civil servants, for some nefarious end. The Nazis detect Kohler's bug and Kohler flees, realizing his jeopardy. He telephones Lieberman and tells him what he heard, but the Nazis interrupt and murder Kohler.

Now Lieberman has no choice but to become involved. He investigates the death of 65 year olds all across Europe and the United States. He soon gains an unwanted partner in this venture, David Bennett, representing a militant Jewish group. Lieberman's first stop is Gladbeck, West Germany, where he talks to a victim's widow and son. The boy bears an uncomfortable resemblance to a young Adolf Hitler, a fact Lieberman doesn't recognize until he visits another widow in the United States. Her son is an exact duplicate of the boy in Gladback. The widow reveals he was adopted, and Lieberman starts to understand the rudiments of Mengela's plans. He visits a war criminal he helped put away and learns that she arranged 94 adoptions before being captured ... all at the behest of Mengela.

Meanwhile, the head of Nazi security terminates Mengela's unusual operation because of Lieberman's interference. Mengela vows to continue his work and sets out to murder the next in the line of 94. At the same time, Lieberman consults a scientist who talks to him

about cloning. The scientist stresses the nurture and nature theory, and Lieberman realizes that all the boys he has seen are not identical twins, but actual physical clones of Hitler. To make their similarity to the Führer complete, Mengela has engineered a program to simulate young Hitler's home life, particularly an overbearing drunk father (and civil servant) who died at age 65, and a doting mother. Shocked, Lieberman realizes that Mengela is breeding 94 new Adolf Hitlers!

Mengela proceeds to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to kill the next unsuspecting father, Mr. Wheelock. He pretends to be Lieberman to gain admittance to the house and then kills the man. Lieberman arrives later and meets up with Mengela. The two men fight, and Wheelock's vicious dogs attack both of them. At the last moment, the dogs are called off by young Bobby Wheelock, a Hitler clone. Mengela reveals to Bobby the truth of his history and destiny. Bobby doesn't believe the wild story and instructs his dogs to rip out Mengela's throat. After Mengela has died, Bobby calls an ambulance for Lieberman ... but only after extracting a promise of silence from him.

David Bennett visits Lieberman in the hospital and reveals his plan to murder all of the young Hitler boys. In an act of defiance, Lieberman burns the list of clone addresses so any further atrocities can be avoided. But ... there are still 94 Hitler clones out there...

COMMENTARY: One of the great things about movies made in the 1970s is that, for the most part, they didn't target specific demographic groups. Instead, filmmakers and studios assumed that a compelling story, well told, would capture the favor of an interested audience. Such is the case with *The Boys from Brazil*, an underrated thriller replete with great scenic locations (à la the James Bond film series), a Hitchcockian soundtrack (thanks to Jerry Goldsmith), and some expert pacing and direction courtesy of *Planet of the Apes* helmer Franklin Schaeffer. This is a thoroughly entertaining film with sterling production values and even an interesting debate about evil and justice.

The plot of *The Boys from Brazil* is a good one straight from Levin's novel. Nazis have cloned Hitler, and in assuming environment is as important as genetics, are taking murderous steps to mimic the

events that made Hitler the mad “genius” the Third Reich so admired. The only thing standing in the way of this well-orchestrated conspiracy is an aged Jewish Nazi hunter who remembers the Holocaust, and thus possesses a fine moral compass.

What makes this thriller so compelling? Two things, actually. The first is that the intricate conspiracy is oddly believable, especially since cloning has now become a reality and our understanding of eugenics moves forward by leaps and bounds all the time. Perhaps more importantly, the plot lingers long enough on the moral issues to generate thrills of an intellectual variety.

For instance, the little Hitler clone seen at the end of the film is nothing short of monstrous. He is vicious, cold, and lacking much of the humanity we assume God grants all his creations. Yet, Lieberman chooses to spare the boy’s life, despite possible future consequences. “We have the right and the duty to what, kill children?” he asks of his companion, the more bloodthirsty and angry Bennett. David counters, logically, that it is wrong to protect Hitler, a man the world understands to be responsible for great evil. Lieberman replies that it is wrong to slaughter the innocent, and the boy is innocent since, as of yet, he has committed no crime.

In science fiction, this very Hitler debate is often rehashed. Would it be right to travel back in time to kill Hitler as a child? Great evil would be prevented, no doubt, but often from great evil also comes great good. *The Boys from Brazil* thoughtfully mulls over this age-old debate as it sets up a bloody confrontation between two of the screen’s great personalities: Laurence Olivier and Gregory Peck. This is a duel of morals, and a personal duel between bitter enemies. With such a strong antagonist and protagonist the film can hardly fail as a thriller, and one gets shivers at Lieberman’s description of Mengela as possessing an evil so “alive and hateful” that he can detect it even over a long-distance phone line.

The Boys from Brazil has all the right touches to succeed as grand entertainment. Early in the film, Schaeffer’s camera catches a glimpse of Lieberman’s apartment, and it is revealed to be a wreck. Papers and files are littered everywhere, and the visuals tell us this is the home of a man who lives in the past via documents, archives and books. Thus, with a throwaway bit of set design, the film

establishes Olivier's obsession with justice, and making the criminals of the past face the present.

On a more grand scale, there is great location filming and stunt work, including a vertigo-inducing scene on a bridge that is tucked between two snowy mountains.

Beyond the action and the production glitter, *The Boys from Brazil* is smart enough to realize the fallacy in Mengela's master plan. By inserting himself into young Hitler's life, he is jeopardizing the very environment he sets out to create. What, then, are we as people? The product of genetics? The product of our environment? Would a Hitler born in the U.S. in the post-war era face the same self-loathing as a boy raised in turn-of-the-century Germany? Would the changes in technology (such as the advent of television) and differences in political systems (democracy versus tyranny) affect how the "new" Hitler sees life? The movie dances around these issues, raising them in clever fashion for just long enough before the next grand set piece.

The Boys from Brazil also nicely captures the skepticism of the younger generation about the Holocaust. The prevailing attitude seems to be: "why are you still bothering with this old thing?" The answer, provided by Lieberman, is that the issues that gave rise to the Third Reich are universal, human ones, and if it could happen once, it could happen again.

Ultimately, that thought is what makes *The Boys from Brazil* a horror film rather than just a particularly gripping action film. Horror doesn't always have to concern aliens, vampires or inhuman monsters. Sometimes, the most frightening pictures are the ones that ask us to look in the mirror and judge our reflection. Could an evil like the Nazis rise again? The kernel of that monstrosity is within all of us unless we remember the past, and *The Boys from Brazil* strives to entertain and enlighten at the same time. It's a solid mix.

***Coma* (1978) * * * ***

Critical Reception

“Another suspenseful film dealing with a medical menace.... This taut, disturbing thriller, from a novel by Robin Cook, shows Crichton’s growth. He manages the eerily paranoid plot with the skill of a Hitchcock, making the best of leading lady Genevieve Bujold....—Douglas Menville and R. Reginald, *Futurevisions: The New Golden Age of Science Fiction Films*, a Greenbriar Book, Newcastle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985, page 62.

“...there’s a pretty good thriller here.... The feeling of reality is inescapable.... Movies like this have a way of turning silly, of producing a lot of unintentional laughs. But *Coma* really works pretty well....—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert’s Movie Home Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 126.

“If hospitals scare you, you’ll die viewing *Coma*, the Robin Cook story which Michael Crichton has directed with some expertise.... Miss Bujold and Mr. Douglas give good performances, helped by her frightened rabbit look and his sangfroid....”—Hugh James, *Films in Review* Volume XXIXI, Number 3, March 1978, page 187.

“Visually, *Coma* is like a prophylactic; it’s so cleanly made, with such an impersonal, detached feeling that it looks untouched by human hands. Even the actors seem vacuous and immaculate, disinfected of any traces of personality. But not Bujold. There’s no way to sanitize this actress. With her slightly moldy Peter Pan pertness, she’s irreducibly curious—that’s her sexy-witch essence... *Coma* is only the second movie that Crichton has directed ... and though he doesn’t yet show a sure enough control of tempo, there’s a particular wryness in his style which suggests intelligence...”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, February 6, 1978, pages 85–86.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Geneviève Bujold (Dr. Susan Wheeler); Michael Douglas (Dr. Mark Bellows); Richard Widmark (Dr. George Harris); Elizabeth Ashley (Ms. Emerson); Rip Torn (Dr. George); Lois Chiles (Nancy Greenly); Lance LeGault (Vince); Harry Rhodes (Dr. Morelind); Gary Burton (Computer Technician); Frank Downing (Kelly); Richard Doyle (Jim); Alan Haufrect (Dr. Marcus); Michael MacRae (Chief Resident); Betty McGuire (Nurse); Tom Selleck (Sean Murphy); Charles Siebert (Dr. Goodman); William Wintersole (Lab Technician); Ernest Anderson (First Doctor); Harry Basch (Second Doctor); Maury Cooper (Third Doctor); Joni Palmer (Dance Instructor); Joanna Kerns (Diane); Kay Cole (Sally); Tom Bokut (Dr. Cowans); Philip C. Brooks (Dr. Richards); Benny Robin (Mr. Schwartz); David Hollander (Jimmy); Dick Balduzzi (First Maintenance Man); Gary Bisig (Second Maintenance Man); Kuri Abbon (First Cop); Wyatt Johnson (Second Cop); Mike Lally, Sr. (Security Man); John Widlock (Norman); Duane Tucker (First Man in Shower); Del Hinkley (Second Man in Shower); Paul Ryan (First Technician); Michael Mann (Second Technician); Sarina G. Grant (Woman in Elevator); David McKnight (Man in Elevator); Gerald Benston (Anesthetist); Robert Burton and Ed Harris (Pathology Residents); Joe Bratcher, Martin Speer, Roger Newman and Paul Davidson (Surgical Residents); Amentha Bymally, Lois Walden, Sharron Frame, Sue Bugain, and Susie Luner (Nurses).

CREW: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Presents a Martin Erlichman Production of a Michael Crichton Film, *Coma*. *Editor:* David Bretherton. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Production Assistant:* Albert Brenner. *Director of Photography:* Victor J. Kemper. *Based on the Novel by:* Robin Cook. *Screenplay:* Michael

Crichton. *Produced by:* Martin Erlichman. *Directed by:* Michael Crichton. *Casting:* Sam Christensen and Joyce Robinson. *Jefferson Institute Sequence Photographed by:* Gerald Hirschfeld. *Unit Production Manager:* Phil Rawlins. *Special Effects:* Joe Day. *Set Decorators:* Rick Simpson. *Assistant Directors:* William McGarry, Ron Crow. *Second Assistant Director:* Alan Brimfield. *Script Supervisor:* Betsy Norton. *Sound Editor:* John Riordan. *Music Editor:* William Saracino. *Sound:* Bill Griffith, William McCaughey, Michael J. Kohut, Aaron Rochin. *Musical Supervisor:* Harry V. Lojewski. *Location Manager:* John James. *Property Master:* Sam Moore. *Miss Bujold's Hairstyle:* Carrie White. *Hairdresser:* Carolyn Ferguson. *Wardrobe:* Eddie Marks, Yvonne Kubis. *Video Coordinator:* Brent Sellstrom. *Assistant Editor:* Chuck Ellison. *Technical Advisors:* Chris Hutson, Cydney Michaelson. *Filmed in:* Metrocolor. *Titles and Opticals:* MGM. *Panaflex Equipment by:* Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 114 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: After a long day on call, Dr. Susan Wheeler, a resident at Boston Memorial Hospital, quarrels with her ambitious doctor boyfriend, Mark Bellows, about hospital politics. The next day, Mark apologizes and asks Susan to lunch, but she attends an aerobics class instead and learns that her best friend Nancy is having an abortion at Boston Memorial. Susan assures Nancy that the procedure is a routine one. However, while Nancy is on the table in OR 8, something goes wrong with the anesthesia. Nancy's blood pressure drops and she slips into an inexplicable coma. The condition is written off as a reaction to anesthesia, but Susan is concerned since Nancy is young and healthy, and the procedure should have gone without difficulty.

Investigating, Susan learns that Nancy was tissue-typed by the lab, an unnecessary test for the abortion procedure. Digging deeper, Susan realizes that the hospital's computer system ordered the tissue typing on Nancy for some reason. She gets a print out of all people diagnosed with unexplainable coma over the last year and

finds that ten young, healthy people have suffered the condition. Susan is called on the carpet before Dr. Harris, the hospital chief administrator, for accessing private computer files, and he recommends that she see a shrink, Dr. Morelind, rather than invent conspiracy stories. Susan sees the psychiatrist, but her interest is piqued when another young person, a man named Sean Murphy, falls into a coma. Susan tells Mark about the situation, but he assures her she is just being paranoid.

Susan continues to probe, accusing Dr. George, head of anesthesiology, of missing some common clinical problem in all the coma patients. Later, the hospital's chief resident asks Mark to control Susan, suggesting his future at the hospital may be ruined because of her nosy behavior.

The comatose Nancy dies and is sent to pathology for an autopsy. Susan watches the procedure and asks pointed questions about methods by which coma might be induced. The pathologist reports that the best way to cause a coma in a healthy person is to feed the patient carbon monoxide instead of anesthesia and thereby kill the brain. Suddenly, Susan thinks she knows what is happening in the hospital. Still, Dr. Harris tells Susan to take some time off and sort out her feelings about Nancy's death. Susan agrees, but is a bit worried when she heads home: a strange man, always in the shadows, seems to be following her. Meanwhile, Susan learns that all the coma patients were operated on in OR 8. She and Mark investigate the room, find nothing unusual, and go away for the weekend to forget the events of the past few days.

Returning from the brief vacation, Susan spies the Jefferson Institute on the road. This is the facility where Boston Memorial's coma patients are transferred to for long-term care. Susan visits the hospital and talks to a nurse who tells her that a tour of the facility is given every Tuesday.

When Susan returns to work on Monday, Kelly the maintenance man contacts her, telling her that he knows how the comas are being achieved. The shadowy assassin kills Kelly before he can divulge the truth to Susan, but Susan crawls through the bowels of the hospital and finds the carbon monoxide pipe leading to OR 8 ... the very proof she needs that there is a conspiracy. Soon, Susan is

pursued by the assassin through a medical college auditorium and then an anatomy lab. She escapes and tells Mark the whole story, but when she hears him whispering on the phone to a colleague, she assumes he is in on the secret plot. Susan flees, spending the night at a motel, and then heads to the Jefferson Institute for the weekly tour. She learns that it is a government sponsored facility for the quality care of the comatose. She is led to a vast room where patients are “stored,” suspended on wires and monitored by computers.

Susan sneaks away from the tour and finds the truth of the institute: healthy organs are being harvested from the comatose patients and sold to the highest bidders all over the world. Security pursues Susan through the building, but she escapes.

Susan returns to Boston Memorial and warns Dr. Harris about the conspiracy. Unfortunately, he is the lead conspirator. He drugs her with a chemical that simulates acute appendicitis. Then, when Susan is immobilized, Harris wheels her to the deadly OR 8 to operate. On the way, Susan spots Mark and tries to convince him she is not really suffering from appendicitis at all. Mark does not heed Susan until he hears Dr. Harris specifically request OR 8. Remembering Susan’s story, Mark races to disconnect the carbon monoxide tubes before Susan suffers the same gruesome fate as Nancy and the others.

COMMENTARY: *Coma* is a remarkable thriller, a spine-tingling venture that plays beautifully on the audience’s fear of hospitals and doctors ... and the strange secrets hidden behind closed doors. This is a world where the normal crashes against the abnormal with suddenness, and the film reveals how even the most “routine” operations can suddenly go haywire and become disastrous. *Coma* eventually crosses over into the most paranoid, horrific terrain imaginable, suggesting that unusual hospital deaths are being orchestrated by a malevolent conspiracy, and thus it becomes a sure-footed horror film replete with great performances, a remarkable set-up, and even a classic revelation sequence.

One thing this writer has always admired about Michael Crichton is his meticulous attention to detail. It can be scientific detail (as in *The Andromeda Strain*), technological detail (as in *Disclosure*), ethnic

detail (as in *Rising Sun*), period detail (as in *The Great Train Robbery*), or biological detail (as in *Jurassic Park*). Whatever his chosen topic, Crichton always inundates his audience (readership and viewership alike) with a wealth of interesting data. More impressively, he serves up this expositional material in a manner that benefits his work as a whole, finding exactly how to make the detail mesh with his narrative. It's a special synthesis that blends trivia with character, knowledge with personality, and Crichton is adroit in building important connections through interludes of information overload.

In *Coma*, Crichton's taut direction focuses first on the idea of "the routine." His camera documents hospital rounds, reveals a locker room, escorts the audience into an operating theater, and so forth. It's a little tour of the hospital world, filled with "shop-talk" and medical jargon, and this opening sequence introduces viewers to the workaday nature of life in a major metropolitan hospital. As someone who worked in such a hospital for years, this author can state with some confidence that Crichton gets the details and the rhythms just right. Though people may be afraid to visit the hospital because of what it portends (injury, sickness, disease), for the army of labor that works there day in and day out (from janitors to doctors, to clerical staff and nurses), it's just a place to do business.



Geneviève Bujold (standing left) discovers the truth about a strange conspiracy during the denouement of *Coma* (1978).

After the routine of the hospital is revealed, Crichton's camera focuses next on a routine of a different sort, a domestic one, as Michael Douglas and Genevieve Bujold bicker over the details of their day. Who should cook? Who gets to shower first? Who had a harder day at the office? Who is more tired? These details sound trifling, but they are the human side of *Coma*'s world. These moments nicely set up the friction between the lead characters, friction that will become a major element of the film's suspense as it unspools. That's why Michael Douglas is so well cast in this picture. He is one performer who can combine ambition, danger, avarice and heroism in the same portrayal and not seem inconsistent. He can seem weaselly enough to betray Susan, and at the same time it wouldn't surprise us for him to be the true-blue hero. Douglas walks an interesting line in this picture, portraying a consistent individual while also teetering between pettiness and decency.

Bujold is clearly the film's protagonist, and she brings a curious sense of obsession to the film. She is infuriating in her steadfastness and unswerving in her need to know the truth. Yet everybody has

probably met someone like her: someone who must have answers at all costs, and who doesn't know when to leave things alone. In both cases, these performances contribute immeasurably to the film.

Yet *Coma* is a thriller after all, and so after documenting his world and his characters in brief but meaningful strokes, Crichton plunges headlong into the nefarious plot to "steal" bodies for profit. Here Crichton goes whole hog into Hitchcock territory, including an unbelievably harrowing sequence in which Susan's friend, Nancy, suddenly seems to die during what should be a routine procedure. The heart monitor beeps plaintively as OR 8 does its nefarious thing, and Crichton has his audience tightly in his grasp. He has shown how "the routine" becomes deadly in a millisecond, and how it can take anyone, even the healthiest of us.

But commendably, the horror of *Coma* is primarily of the cerebral variety. The screenplay provides a boatload of statistics about anesthesia, and it slowly starts to dawn on the audience that medicine isn't quite an exact science in some cases. We get psychological jargon too, deployed to dissuade Bujold from pursuing her quest. Then there's the conspiracy itself. This is one of those movies where everyone is a suspect, and every whispered word or darting eye can be interpreted as part of the secret plan. That's the trick of Crichton's conceit in the film: he takes us from routine right up to throat-clenching suspicion and terror. It's building to a crescendo of paranoia, and Crichton orchestrates his set pieces (such as the chase through the anatomy lab) with almost sadistic glee.

But the thing that remains the most successful about *Coma* is its final, unexpected leap into the realm of the fantastic. Near the finale of the film, Bujold's character stumbles into a vast hall where comatose bodies are stored. The camera scans this strange, dead hall and realization dawns on viewers that *hundreds* of people are suspended in this fashion, their bodies exploited for science. The scope of the conspiracy is gigantic, and these bodies, suspended on wires like puppets, form one of '70s horror cinema's most unforgettable images. Like Katharine Ross—suddenly big-breasted and black-eyed at the climax of *The Stepford Wives*—this hall of exploitation seems to speak volumes of the age in which it was

forged. In the seventies there was a vast distrust of science and medicine, and a belief that our best interests are not always medicine's foremost goal. On the surface, such a vast operation is not very believable in our reality. After all, people go in and out of this building every day, and it would require an army of technicians to oversee the facility of the "dead." Yet by the time *Coma* has worked itself up to this brilliant revelation, director Crichton has whipped the audience into a frenzy of paranoia, and it accepts the unacceptable without blinking an eye. We have been led, step by step, to this state of unqualified belief.

And for that reason, plus Bujold and Douglas's performances, *Coma* is one of the decade's great ventures into terror and "science gone awry." By the time Susan (Bujold) has learned the truth and been drugged by the villainous head conspirator, the audience knows exactly what to expect in OR 8, and, like Susan, is desperate to avoid that room at all costs.

Damien—Omen II (1978) * *

Critical Reception

“...yet another example of clone cinema regurgitated by Hollywood to capitalize on the name of a money-making predecessor and fad genre ... just plain dull. The sole purpose of *Damien—Omen II* is to shock the viewer with creatively cinematic deaths.... For all the stylishness of the production, Don Taylor could easily have been John Doe.”—Rob Edelman, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIX, Number 7, August-September 1978, page 438.

“The screenplay ... is so straight-faced that it might have been starched. Indeed, apart from William Holden’s worried features ... everyone’s face seems to have been ironed.”—Penelope Gilliatt, *New Yorker*, June 19, 1978, pages 85–86.

Cast & Crew

CAST: William Holden (Richard Thorn); Lee Grant (Ann Thorn); Robert Foxworth (Paul Buher); Nicholas Pryor (Charles Warren); Lew Ayres (Bill Atherton); Sylvia Sidney (Aunt Marian); Lucas Donat (Mark Thorn); Jonathan Scott-Taylor (Damien); Leo McKern (Bugenhagen); Ian Hendry (Archaeologist); Lance Henriksen (Sgt. Daniel Neff); Elizabeth Shepherd (Joan Hart); Alan Arbus (Pasarian); Fritz Ford (Jurray); Meshach Taylor (Dr. Kane); John J. Newcombe (Teddy); John Charles Burns (Butler); Paul Cook (Colonel); Diane Daniels (Jane); Robert E. Ingham (Teacher); William B. Fessor (Minister); Corney Morgan (Greenhouse Technician); Russel P. Delia (Truck Driver); Judith Dowd (Maid); Thomas O. Erhart, Jr. (Sgt. #1); Sorin Pricopie (Pasarian’s Assistant); Albert J. Jones

(Tour Guide); Rusdi Lane (Jim Gardner); Charles Mountain (Burial Priest); Cornelia Sanders (Young Girl); Felix Shuman (Dr. Fiedler); James Spinks (Technician #1); Owen Sullivan (Byron); William J. Whelehan (Security Guard).

CREW: A 20th Century–Fox Presentation of a Harvey Bernhard Production in association with Mace Neufeld, *Damien—The Omen II*. *Editor:* Robert Brown, Jr. *Production Designer:* Philip M. Jeffries, Fred Harpman. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Director of Photography:* Bill Butler. *Co-producer:* Charles Orme. *Story:* Harvey Bernhard. *Based on Characters Created by:* David Seltzer. *Screenplay by:* Stanley Mann and Michael Hodges. *Produced by:* Harvey Bernhard. *Directed by:* Don Taylor. *Associate Producer:* Joseph “Pepi” Lenzi. *Casting by:* Lynn Stalmaster. *First Assistant Director:* Al Nicholson, Jerry Ballew. *Script Supervisor:* H. Bud Otto. *Set Decorator:* Robert DeVestel. *Property Master:* Bill MacSems. *Make-up:* Robert Dawn, Lillian Toth. *Wardrobe:* Ray Summers. *Camera Operators:* James Connell, Jack Richards. *Production Manager:* Al Overton. *Dialogue Editor:* Geoffrey Marks. *Sound Editor:* Edward Rossi, Richard A. Sperber, William Hartman. *Music Editor:* Len Engel. *Assistant Editor:* David Garfield, Willie Navarro. *Underwater Photography:* Al Giddings. *Special Effects:* Ira Anderson, Jr. *Raven Trainer:* Ray Berwick. *Stunt Coordinator:* Max Kleven. *Israel Sequences Serviced by:* Israfilm Motion Picture Services. *Israel Sequences Photographed by:* Gil Taylor. *Assisted by:* Derek Bowne, Ron Taberer. *Miniatures Photographed by:* Stanley Cortez. *Miniatures:* Chuck Taylor. *Technical Advisor:* Dr. W.S. McBurnie, Ph.D. *Miss Grant’s Clothes:* Burton Miller. *Snowmobiles Furnished by:* Kawasaki. Produced by the 20th Century Film Corporation in Los Angeles and on location in Chicago, Illinois, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Eagle River, Wisconsin, and Israel. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 107

minutes.

P.O.V.

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”—II Corinthians Chapter 11, Verse 13

“That’s one thing that I think was wrong with the script, the idea that More is Better. There was too much gore... Then it got really gruesome in the end. Suddenly Bill is stabbed to death and Lee Grant gets burned up—Jesus! More is *not* better”³⁶.—director Don Taylor describes his feelings about *Damien—Omen II* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: A week after Ambassador Thorn’s death in London, the child Antichrist, Damien, is in the care of his dead father’s family in Chicago. Bugenhagen, the exorcist who Ambassador Thorn visited shortly before his passing, warns an archaeologist friend of Damien’s true nature. He takes him to a dig in Jesreal, to the underground catacombs, and reveals a relief that depicts the face of the Antichrist. The archaeologist is shocked to see that Damien is, indeed, a dead ringer for the evil force. Before either man can warn the Thorns, they are buried alive in a cave-in.

Seven years later, Damien has been raised as a son to Richard and Ann Thorn and as a brother to Mark Thorn. Only old Aunt Marian suspects that Damien is evil, and she soon dies of a heart attack. Meanwhile, Damien attends Davidson Military Academy and is treated warmly by the new instructor in charge of his platoon, Sergeant Neff. At the same time, Richard Thorn’s corporation is considering a controversial plan that will buy up land in underdeveloped countries and provide foodstuffs in the event of famine. The company president, Bill Atherton, considers the plan unethical because it will make people tenants in their own country, beholden to an American corporation for food. The creator of the plan, Paul Buhar, insists contrarily that “famine is the future” of Thorn Industries. When Bill Atherton dies suddenly, falling through the ice and drowning during a hockey game at Mark’s birthday party, Paul becomes president of Thorn Industries and puts his plan

into motion.

A reporter, Joan Hart, has found the corpse of Bugenhagen at the dig in Israel, as well as the ceremonial daggers that can be used to kill the Antichrist. She also finds a letter from Bugenhagen warning the Thorn family that the Devil's son is in its midst. Hart attempts to warn Richard Thorn, but he will hear none of it. Hart is silenced forever when her car breaks down on a deserted highway, a raven plucks her eyes out and she is struck by a passing truck.

At Davidson, Sgt. Neff informs Damien of his true identity, imploring the boy to read the Book of Revelation. Damien is curious and does as he is told. He soon finds the mark of the Devil, 666, on his scalp and realizes the evil he will represent to the world.

After a dangerous chemical spill at Thorn Corporation, Damien's biological heritage is confirmed by a doctor who conducts blood tests on the boy. Oddly, Damien has the same blood and cell structure as a jackal! Before the doctor can report his findings, he is trapped in an elevator that goes berserk, and is dissected by wire cable.

At the Thorn Museum of Arts, curator Charles Warren follows up on the research of reporter Joan Hart and learns that Damien is the Antichrist. This fact is confirmed again, this time by the Wall of Yigale, which reveals the Antichrist's face from birth to downfall. Warren warns Thorn, who again ignores the danger. Young Mark Thorn overhears the conversation between Warren and his father and comes to realize that his adopted brother is evil. He confronts Damien with this truth and Damien has no choice but to kill him. Mark dies of an apparent aneurysm, but Mr. Thorn is finally moved to act.

With Warren at his side, he visits the train yard where the Wall of Yigale is in storage. He views the relief and comes to realize that Damien is truly the Antichrist. A deadly train "accident" claims Warren's life, but Thorn survives and returns home. He issues orders that Damien be brought to the museum of arts, and then plots to kill the boy with Bugenhagen's ceremonial daggers.

Thorn is betrayed by his wife, Ann, as well as his company

president, Paul, and Sgt. Neff, who have all been assisting Damien reach maturity. Ann stabs Thorn with the daggers and kills him. Tying up loose ends, Damien arrives at the museum and causes it to explode in flames, destroying the evidence against him and killing Thorn and Ann, his adoptive parents.

COMMENTARY: *Damien: The Omen II* artlessly lands *The Omen* saga back at square one. None of the insipid characters in this sequel understand the evil (Damien) in their midst. Consequently, the audience is forced to go through the same set of steps as they witnessed in the original film as various people warn the Thorn family of danger, and then are brutally killed for interfering in the Antichrist's master plan. Like future entries in the *Friday the 13th* film series in the 1980s, this film exists primarily as a showcase for various—and gory—special effects murders. But there is no narrative advancement from the previous film worth talking about.

The most memorable and oft-discussed scene in 1976's *The Omen* came when actor David Warner's character, a photographer, was decapitated by a sheet of plate glass. *Damien: The Omen II* appears to exist solely to top that moment. Hence there is a scene in which a woman has her eyes pecked out by crows before being crunched by a Mack truck. Hence there is a moment when a man is ripped apart by an elevator cable. Hence there is a moment when somebody slips under an ice flow and drowns, and so forth. The film is monotonously constructed so as to make room for all these grisly moments ... but there has been no such innovative thought about character interaction or growth.

Here's the structure of the movie: a character learns the secret of Damien, is unheeded, and then is horribly killed. Another character learns the secret of Damien, is unheeded, and then is likewise killed. A third character learns ... and so on and so forth, until any semblance of plot is lost. This film plays more like a "best of" *Omen* catalog than a legitimate film sequel.

Omen II may be the most powerful reminder of what a good film the original *Omen* actually was. Gregory Peck was important to that film because the story followed him from the opening deceit at a hospital involving a baby, to creeping doubt about Damien, to denial, and ultimately, too late, to belief. He was a powerful

protagonist who went through various steps of development and denial, and the audience cared about him. There is no such character to follow in *Omen II*. William Holden's version of Thorn is a remote, uninteresting one not allowed much screen time. The focus is more diffuse so as to allow for what *Scream 2* (1997) nicely and knowingly termed "carnage candy." In fact, *Scream 2* had the skinny on this sequel right down to the letter: there are more characters, the death scenes are much more elaborate, and there's plenty of opportunity for gore. For some horror fans, that is undoubtedly enough, but *Damien* is not in the same class as its predecessor despite sterling production values and special effects.

In fact, *Damien—Omen II* actually undercuts *The Omen*, because it is not the sequel envisioned by the original film. In the closing moments of *The Omen*, Damien was seen holding the hand of the president of the United States, an indication that the boy was to be adopted by the most powerful man in the world. *Damien—Omen II* dispenses with that fascinating premise, instead sending Damien back to the American branch of the Thorn family. So even in regards to plot points, *Omen II* is not consistent with what came before.

Logic has also gone out the window. For instance, a discerning horror movie fan will wonder how Bugenhagen got his hands on those fancy ceremonial daggers after giving them to Thorn at the end of *The Omen*. Certainly, they would have been confiscated as evidence, since Peck's Thorn attempted to stab Damien with them at a church's altar. If the time frame of *Omen II* is to be accepted, then Bugenhagen somehow got the daggers back from the police within one week of Thorn's death, just in time to be buried alive with them. Not bloody likely.

It's a sad moment when horror franchises go from greatness to mere schlock. It took the *Alien* saga four films to reach its nadir (with the rotten *Alien Resurrection* [1997]), but it takes *The Omen* saga just one film to deteriorate into gore for the sake of gore. If it is any consolation to the makers of this film, the next sequel, *The Final Conflict* (1981), was even worse...

Dominique (1978) * * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Cliff Robertson (David Barrett); Jean Simmons (Dominique Barrett); Jenny Agutter (Ann); Simon Ward (Tony); Ron Moody, Jeedy Geeson, Michael Jayston, Flora Robson, David Tomlinson, Jack Warner, Leslie Dwyer, Erin Gearghy, Brian Hayes, Ian Holder, Jack McKenzie, Michael Nightingale.

CREW: Melvin Simon Presents a Sword and Sorcery Production, *Dominique*. *Director of Photography:* Ted Moore. *Production Designer:* David Minty. *Film Editor:* Richard Best. *Production Administrator:* Ron Atkinson. *Music:* David Whitaker. *Screenplay:* Edward and Valerie Abraham. *From a Story by:* Harold Lawlor. *Executive Producer:* Melvin Simon. *Produced by:* Milton Subotsky, Andrew Donally. *Directed by:* Michael Anderson. *Costumes:* Win Hemmink, Douglas Hayward. *Production Manager:* Rufus Andrews. *Camera Operator:* Mike Roberts. *Assistant Director:* Brian Cook. *Continuity:* Ann Skinner. *Sound Recordist:* David Owen, Bob Jones. *Sound Editor:* Alfred Cox. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Bridget Sellers. *Make-up:* Tom Smith. *Hairdressing:* Bobbie Smith. *Construction Manager:* John Godfrey. Made at Shepperton Studio Centre, England. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 99 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Wealthy socialite Dominique Barrett feels her sanity slipping away. She does not remember firing the chauffeur, and she's never been quite the same since she fell down the staircase a year ago. Then, one night, Dominique finds a ghoulish skeleton hanging in her conservatory. Her husband, David, checks out the room but finds nothing there. Upset, Dominique comes to believe that David is trying to drive her crazy. She enlists the help of the new chauffeur, Tony, but he refuses to take sides between his employers. Crestfallen, Dominique hangs herself in the conservatory. David and Tony cut her down and summon a doctor, but it is too late. Dominique is dead. Clutched in her dead hand is a

note requesting that she be buried with her Etruscan bracelet and that her will not be read until Halloween night.

After the funeral, David Barrett returns to his palatial home and, unobserved ... smiles. He was driving Dominique crazy because his business was in shambles and he needed her money. But, unexpectedly, David starts to be troubled by strange noises in the house. Then he receives a call from the cemetery: someone has delivered a headstone—his headstone—to the graveyard. It lists his death date as “soon.” When David questions the gravestone maker, the man tells him a woman in black requested it, stating she was in mourning over the death of her husband. Is Dominique alive?

The next night, David awakens to discover Dominique’s beloved piano playing itself. Then he hears footsteps and spies Dominique walking down the hallway. She vanishes, but the next night she appears again, this time with the hanging rope in her outstretched hand. She also leaves David a gift: the bracelet with which she was buried. Desperate, David pays Tony to help him open Dominique’s grave. When they open the coffin, they find it filled with stones. Back at home, David finds Dominique’s corpse hanging again in the conservatory. He fetches Tony, but Dominique has disappeared when they return.

At his office the following day, David receives a letter from Dominique saying she looks forward to his death on October 25 ... tomorrow! David has Dominique’s body officially exhumed so as to prove to authorities that his wife is still alive and conspiring against him. To his surprise, Dominique’s body is in the coffin when it is opened. Oddly, this revelation panics the doctor who declared Dominique dead. He packs to leave town, but before he can escape, an assailant in black murders him.

At the cemetery, David’s marker now reads that he has only one day to live. By night, David resorts to sleeping with a gun. He fires several times at a spectral Dominique, but is unable to kill her. He hides in his room at midnight as October 25 finally comes. A repentant David confesses his crime to Tony. When Dominique comes for him again, this time brandishing a knife, David falls to his death through the conservatory roof.

Dominique's last will and testament is heard on October 31st. She left all her money to Tony, her only "true friend." David's will bequeathed all his money to his live-in half-sister, Ann. Later, Tony, out of a job, plans to leave the Barrett house. Before he departs for good, he turns off a tape recording of Dominique's voice calling David's name. Then he retrieves a remote control that activated the piano. Finally, he meets with his accomplice: Ann! Ann and Tony plotted with Dominique to kill David, but were forced to kill Dominique when David needed to see a body at the exhumation. After Dominique's death, Ann resurrected her by wearing a life-like face mask they had forged while Dominique was a partner in crime.

With Dominique's money in hand and all the unpleasant business finished, David decides to leave Ann, his lover. She won't let him go, and there is one more murder in the Barrett house.

COMMENTARY: *Dominique* is like a two-hour episode of HBO's *Tales from the Crypt*, but without the ghoulish cryptkeeper or the tongue planted firmly in cheek. It's one of those old-fashioned "comeuppance" stories in which karma plays one of the most important roles. In *Dominique*, a man who makes his own wife question her sanity eventually has his sanity questioned in similar fashion. The story is so old that it creaks, but this is a low-key thriller that manages to suck the audience in with its spare approach to dialogue and its nice visual presentation.

Nothing supernatural actually occurs in *Dominique*, and that may disappoint aficionados of the genre. This is a horror movie that plays its cards close to the vest, and one is never sure if it is going to lurch headlong into "spook" territory. For instance, the moments of alleged occult happenstance are highlighted by a cold blue light—a nice visual metaphor for a chill. Of course, such a transition in the lighting makes no sense in the plot itself, since the "occurrences" are not supernatural at all, but merely the plotting of double-crossing lovers. Still, it's like a well-timed *Mission: Impossible* episode in which one must accept certain improbabilities (like effective face masks that fool people totally...) to buy into the plot.

Part of the reason why one might be willing to buy into *Dominique* is that it is fun to see Cliff Robertson's character get the business at the end. He plays a hard-hearted man and a cool customer, and it is

entertaining to see such an arrogant man get his comeuppance. The stately tenor of the plot also works in the film's favor. The plot moves at a pace that might kindly be termed leisurely, and so the audience is left to wonder about certain issues as the movie runs over long spaces and gaps of interest. Is David's gun loaded with blanks? Could the piano be rigged to play by itself? Who might have ordered David's gravestone? Our knowledge of a million B movies, potboilers and pulp mysteries has made amateur detectives of us all, and *Dominique* gives us the time, and the silences, we need to process possibilities one at a time. And, when it's really clever, the film overturns our expectations too. For instance, bullet holes are found in a wall, so the "blanks" theory goes out the window, and another answer is hence sought.

Dominique is the kind of movie that probably wouldn't be made today. It is low-key, methodical, ambiguous, and only mildly jolting. Had it been made in the 1940s, Bette Davis would have been the star. It's old-fashioned, and not terribly innovative, but viewing it today is like visiting an old friend you haven't seen in a few years. You re-familiarize yourself with all the old clichés and twists, and find that, ultimately, you've missed them.

***Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978) * ***

Critical Reception

"Long on trendy settings, high-priced actors and vicious murders, but devoid of narrative thrills.... *Laura Mars* quickly devolves into a prosaic whodunit with a gyp of an ending...."—Frank Rich, *Time*, August 21, 1978.

"On just about any terms—sociological, psychological, romantic, dramatic or thriller—*Eyes of Laura Mars* seems déjà vu.... The climactic scene would like to be romantic tragedy but the movie by then has wasted too much time."—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982.

“This is a thriller with serious pretensions.... It deals in matters that raise serious questions, it mutters them, and drops them like tons of cement....”—Penelope Gilliat, *New Yorker*, August 21, 1978.

“*Laura Mars* is a casualty of the kinky, burnt-out, what’s-in-it-for-me ’70s ... more mush than memorable.”—Rob Edelman, *Films in Review*, October 1978, page 500.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Faye Dunaway (Laura Mars); Tommy Lee Jones (John Neville); Brad Dourif (Tommy Ludlow); Rene Auberjonois (Donald Phelps); Raul Julia (Michael Reisler); Frank Adonis (Sal Volpe); Lisa Taylor (Michele); Darlanne Fluegel (Lulu); Rose Gregorio (Elaine Cassell); Bill Boggs (Himself); Steve Marachuk (Robert); Meg Mundy (Doris Spenser); Marilyn Meyers (Sheila Wiessman); Gary Bayer (Reporter); Mitchell Edmonds (Reporter); Michael Tucker (Bert); Jeff Niki (Photo Assistant); John E. Allen (Billy T.); Anna Anderson, Deborah Beck, Jim Devine, Hanny Friedman, Winnie Holliman, Oatta Oja, Donna Palmer, Sterling St. Jacques, Rita Tellone, Kari Page (Models); Dallas Edward Hayes (Douglas); John Randolph Jones, Al Joseph, Gerlad Kline, Sal Richards, Tom Degidon (Police); Paula Lawrence (Aunt Caroline); Joey R. Mills (Make-up Person); John Sahag (Hairdresser); Hector Troy (Cab Driver).

CREW: Columbia Pictures Presents a Jon Peters Production of an Irvin Kershner Film, *Eyes of Laura Mars*. *Film Editor:* Michael Kahn. *Costumes:* Theoni V. Aldredge. *Production Designer:* Gene Callahan. *Director of Photography:* Victor J. Kemper. *Executive Producer:* Jack H. Harris. *Screenplay:* John Carpenter, David Zelag Goodman. *Story:* John

Carpenter. *Directed by:* Irvin Kershner. *Love Theme Sung by:* Barbra Streisand. *Words and Music:* Karen L. Lawrence, John Desautels. *Produced by:* Gary Klein. *Associate Producer:* Laura Ziskin. *Production Executive:* George Justice. *Musical Supervisor:* Charles A. Koppelman. *Gallery Photographs:* Helmut Newton. *Casting Supervisor:* Cis Corman. *Unit Production Manager:* Louis A. Stroller. *Special Photographic Consultant:* Rebecca Blake. *Special Project Assistant:* Susan Landau. *Art Director:* Robert Gundlach. *Assistant Directors:* Louis A. Stroller, Mel Howard. *Second Assistant Director:* Joseph Maimon, Jr. *Music Editor:* Joan Biel. *Sound Editor:* Chuck Campbell. *Assistant Editors:* Paula la Mastra, Trudy Ship, Emily Payne. *Script Supervisor:* Bette Nance. *Camera Operator:* Lou Barlia. *First Assistant Cameraman:* Jack Brown. *Second Assistant Cameraman:* Bruce MacCallam. *Sound Mixer:* Lez Lararowitz. *Special Effects:* Edward Drohan. *Sound Effects:* Neiman Tillar Associates. *Set Decorator:* John Godfrey. *Make-up:* Lee Harman, Vance Gallagher, Lynn Donohue. *Hairstyles for Ms. Dunaway:* Bernadine Mann. *Costumers:* James Hagerman, Marilyn Bishop. *Property Master:* Walter Stocklin. *Stunt Coordinator:* Alex Stevens. *Special Photographic Effects:* James Liles. *Titles:* Cinema Research Corp. *Chem-Tone Negative Processing:* TVC Labs. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 104 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Chic fashion photographer Laura Mars awakens from a nightmare in which she has witnessed, through the eyes of a murderer, the death of her editor, Doris Spenser. Later, at the debut of her latest pictorial exhibit in Soho, Laura learns that Doris is really dead. A young policeman, John Neville, questions her about the murder, and Laura wonders if her dream was psychic.

During a busy Manhattan photo shoot, Laura experiences a second vision: the murder of gallery owner Elaine Cassell. She flees to the scene of the crime and is arrested by the police. Neville questions

her again and shows her crime scene photographs that eerily match Laura's portfolio. Laura is released, and she and Neville search Cassell's apartments for clues. There, they learn that Laura's ex-husband, Michael, is back in town and in need of cash. He might be a suspect, as is Laura's ex-con chauffeur, Tommy.

At another shoot, this time in a warehouse, Laura is immobilized by fear again. This time, she sees the killer murdering Lulu and Michelle, two of her top models, with an ice pick. Like before, she is seeing reality. After the funeral of the models, Neville and Laura strike up a romantic relationship. When Laura goes to her manager's birthday party, the mysterious assailant kills him too, and Tommy is fingered as the killer because his trademark deck of cards is found at the scene of the crime. When Tommy attempts to flee police custody, he is shot and killed, and the case is closed.

Laura packs to go on vacation with Neville when she experiences her next daydream of terror. This time, she sees a man murdered in the elevator of her own building, but she is not sure if the dead man is Michael, her ex-husband, or Neville, her current lover. She gets her answer when Neville breaks into the apartment and reveals he is a schizophrenic psychopath. He believes that Laura's photography and art sells death, and disapproves of it.

In a moment of clarity, Neville's "good" personality emerges and begs Laura to put him out of his misery. Laura obliges, shooting Neville and ending the reign of the ice-pick killer.

COMMENTARY: An outdated star-vehicle for a past-her-prime star (Faye Dunaway), *Eyes of Laura Mars* is a glitzy, stylish, but ultimately empty thriller. Though the film is competently mounted and boasts a glossy big-budget veneer, it is more interested in a tired romance than suspense, and the result is a distinctly lethargic picture in which none of the principals evoke much sympathy.

Eyes of Laura Mars has the scent of the 1970s all over it, and that should have been a good thing. The films of the 70s are many things, including experimental, stylish, personal and liberated in their use of film technique. In a visual sense, *Eyes of Laura Mars* takes advantage of Hitchcock's so-called "new freedom," and that plays in the movie's favor. For instance, the film opens not with a

murder, or with the linear beginning of the narrative, but with a startling freeze-frame close-up of Dunaway's right eye. The camera retracts slowly to a shot of both dazed-looking eyes, and then in stark black and white, the image turns sour, negative. Suddenly, a plaintive Barbra Streisand starts singing a strident pop tune over the visuals, and the screen fades inexorably to black. No doubt this opening sounds like a camp hoot, but it immediately establishes what is important in the film: Laura's vision. It then notes how her "sight" will affect her life (since the title of the song is "Prisoner").

This stylish opening of the film is referenced again at the denouement, as the same freeze frame is shown, again turning into a "negative" image. Since these close-ups book end the film, they suggest that the story unfolding in between is merely another phantasm passing before Laura's eyes. The book-end images grant the film a distinct and interesting context, but ultimately there is not enough significant connection between the frames. The opening freeze frame, which seems curious, should by the time it reappears at the climax, be burdened with a sense of tragedy and meaning, yet the film doesn't generate that deep sense of love twisted and gone wrong, or the notion that Laura has been traumatized. Instead, the images serve solely as book-ends, and what is in between hardly seems worth reading, despite the artistic techniques used to open and close the case of Laura Mars.

Director Irvin Kershner brings visual flair to the remainder of the film, and rightly many scenes boast an interesting perspective. After the first murder, Laura awakens from a nightmare and prowls her apartment. Kershner lenses this sequence in extreme long shot for good reasons. First, the presence of this woman alone in a huge apartment augments her isolation, and visualizes the story's conceit that Laura is a lonely woman who has failed in love. Secondly, it notes the vanity of the character. Her bedroom is crescent-shaped. Behind the bed (which stands alone in the center of the room on a pedestal of sorts), the walls are covered in mirrors. In other words, Laura has fashioned in her apartment a haven where all she sees are images of self. As Laura is an artist who "sees" for a living, this is a noteworthy point to stress visually, and the long view of the apartment does so. It also suggests that Laura has, perhaps, been somewhat taken with her own celebrity. The mirrored bedroom

expresses this characterization in a way that the central performance doesn't quite manage.

Many of the film's problems, then, begin and end with Faye Dunaway. She is an accomplished performer, but gives a remarkably chilly, mannered performance in *Eyes of Laura Mars*. She skims only the surface of the character's personality and resolutely fails to project vulnerability. Although she reaches heights of hysteria, Dunaway does not express well the notion that this woman is terrified for her life, terrified of being alone, and terrified of being involved in the central murders. Because she is unable to express these vulnerabilities, Dunaway's love scenes in *Eyes of Laura Mars* shrivel before the audience's eyes. She mouths lines like "I can't control myself," yet Dunaway's performance is so tightly controlled, so rigid and glacier-like, that the line comes off as insincere. It is impossible to believe that this woman cannot control any aspect of her life.

In fairness, Dunaway is not assisted by the screenplay, which calls on her to literally become paralyzed, again and again, at the most awkward (and humorous) moments. This paralysis is caused by the psychic link with the killer and it results in Laura becoming non-functional. Her eyes become the camera, and there is a distancing factor for the audience. Everything is normal, Laura freezes, and the audience gets a close-up of her frightened eyes again and again. In essence then, Laura is a kind of early warning system that reveals the killer is about to commit a crime. This conceit robs the film of suspense. Rather than propel the story, these visions keep it on the same dull groove throughout.

Equally disturbing is the screenplay's tendency to take a great cast (Rene Auberjonois, Brad Dourif, Raul Julia and Mike Tucker), and provide each with only enough screen time to appear as plausible suspects. There is nothing wrong with a few red herrings, but *Eyes of Laura Mars* populates its film with them.

And then there's the final, insulting twist: that the killer is Laura's lover, John Neville. The last scene reveals that Neville is schizophrenic; possessed of good and evil personalities. This is a particularly functional brand of schizophrenia, however, as it does not affect Neville's work or his romantic relationship. Instead, he

transforms into the killer just when the plot requires it, only for a sense of surprise. Even Neville's motives are cloudy. He kills all of Laura's friends because he feels her work glorifies death? Huh? Besides, it is finally established that Laura gleams her imagery not from an inner voice but by a psychic connection with Neville himself. What this means, essentially, is that Neville wants to kill Laura for dramatizing what he is thinking. But if he thinks her work is bad because it glorifies death, then he must also be bad for glorifying death, since he gave her the violent imagery in the first place!

Eyes of Laura Mars is a weak film that is beautiful to look at. It is filled with provocative, interesting images, such as the moment Tommy Lee Jones stands in front of a broken mirror, side by side with his reflection. For this one moment, his character's schizophrenia is given physical form. One image in the mirror is crystal clear, the other is part of a shattered mirror, like his splintered psyche. Yet the skillfully composed images, the pop seventies soundtrack (which includes "Shake Your Booty" and "Boogie Night") and the authentic Manhattan locations are not enough to make sense out of a film in search of its soul. For a movie ostensibly about vision, *Eyes of Laura Mars* is blind to humanity and emotions, content to provide viewers only the most surface responses to the most interesting of questions.

***The Fury* (1978) * * ***

Critical Reception

"*The Fury* could only have been made by Brian DePalma: the direction is stylish; the ambience is bizarre; the violence, or its expectation, is ever-present. But unlike DePalma's *Carrie* and *Obsession*, this horror tale is unfortunately muddled, and a throwback to his earlier promising though uneven *Phantom of the Paradise* and *Sisters*.... *The Fury* is fourth-rate *Carrie* and sixth-rate *Obsession*."—Rob Edelman, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIX, Number 5, May 1978, page 313.

“...in fits and starts, the kind of mindless fun that only a horror movie that so seriously pretends to be about the mind can be. Mr. DePalma seems to have been less interested in the overall movie than in pulling off a couple of spectacular set-pieces, which he does.”—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, March 15, 1978, C19.

“Complex but technically accomplished horror movie with various points of interest for connoisseurs of its director.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 110.

“DePalma started his film career strongly, then seemed to become more interested in the way his films were made rather than what they were saying. This movie marks the start of the degeneration of his storytelling abilities ... watchable, but dumb and pretentious. DePalma overloads the film with cinematic tricks and subplots that detract from the taut thriller this could have been.”—Richard Meyers, *SF 2*, Citadel Press, 1984, page 102.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Kirk Douglas (Peter); John Cassavetes (Childress); Carrie Snodgress (Hester); Charles Durning (Dr. Jim McKeever); Amy Irving (Gillian); Fiona Lewis (Susan Charles); Andrew Stevens (Robin); Carol Roseen (Dr. Lindstrom); Rutana Ald (Kristen); Joyce Easton (Mrs. Belldriver); William Finley (Raymond); Jane Lambert (Vivian); Sam Laws (Brockfish); J. Patrick McNamara (Robertson); Alice Nunn (Mrs. Callahan); Melody Thomas (LaRue); Hilary Thompson (Cheryl); Patrick Billingsley (Lander); J.P. Bumstead (Greene); Barry Cullison (Chase #1 Driver); Jack Callahan (Mast); Dennis Franz (Bob); Anthony Hawkins (Chase #1

Shotgun); Michael O'Dwyer (Marty); Felix Shuman (Dr. Ives); Albert Stevens (Arab Prince); Anne Brook (Deborah); Eve Cadel (Woman); John Roche (Drunk); Gordon Jump (Nuckels); Eleanor Merriam (Mother Nickels); Howard Johnson (Garbage Man); Wayne Dahmer (Nelson); Joe Finnegan (Man); Daryl Hannah (Pam); Laura Innes (Jody); Clair Nelson (Dr. Becker); Peter O'Connell (Dr. Conn); Al Wyatt (Security Agent Driver); Douglas J. Stevenson (House Boy); Mickey Gilbert, Harris Manship, Morland Proctor (Agents); Marshall Coll, Roberta Feldner, Stephen Johnson, Robin Marmor (Technicians); Michael Copeland, Alfred Tinsley (Tough Youths); Tom Blair (Top Guy #1); Gunnar Lewis (Top Guy #2).

CREW: 20th Century–Fox Presents a Frank Yablans Presentation of a Brian DePalma film, *The Fury*.
Edited by: Paul Hirsch. *Costume Designer:* Theoni V. Aldridge. *Production Designer:* Bill Malley. *Music:* John Williams. *Director of Photography:* Richard H. Kline. *Associate Producer:* Jack B. Bernstein. *Executive Producer:* Ron Preissman. *Screenplay by:* John Farris. *Based on the Novel by:* John Farris. *Production Manager:* Jack B. Bernstein. *Assistant Director:* Donald F. Heitzer. *Second Assistant Director:* Kim C. Friese. *Script Supervisor:* Ray Quiroz. *Camera Operator:* Albert Bettcher. *Process Coordinator:* Bill Hansard. *Stunt Coordinator:* Mickey Gilbert. *Art Director:* Richard Lawrence. *Set Decorator:* Audrey Brosdel-Goddard. *Property Master:* Bill Bates. *Assistant Editor:* Maria Iono, Pat Shade. *Construction Coordinator:* Hendryk Wynards. *Mens' Costumer:* Seth Banks. *Women's Costumer:* Margo Baxley. *Hairstylist:* Emma M. D. Vitterio. *Production Mixer:* Hal Etherington. *Music Editors:* Robert Raff, George Korngold. *Sound Editor:* Dan Sable. *Make-up Supervisor:* William Tuttle. *Special Make-up Effects:* Rick Baker. *Special Effects:* A.D. Flowers. *Casting:* Lyn Stalmaster. *M.P.A.A. Rating:*

R. *Running Time*: 120 minutes.

P.O.V.

“How could I give up gore? What would all my blood-soaked fans do?”³⁷.—Brian DePalma ponders his next film, on the publicity junket for *The Fury* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: In the Middle East in 1977, an American secret agent, Peter Sanza, is betrayed by his partner, Childress. Sanza’s son, Robin, possesses unusual telepathic powers the government wants to harness, and Peter is considered expendable in the quest to control Robin. But Peter survives the government’s assassination attempt, even as Robin is spirited away, devastated that his father is believed dead.

In Chicago, eleven months later, another adolescent with psychic powers, Gillian, is the object of a second hunt. Peter believes that only Gillian can help him contact Robin, who is sequestered at a secret government facility. Childress knows that Sanza is onto him, and has put a trace on Gillian too. Meanwhile, Gillian comes to develop her powers, including telekinesis. Her powers create an unusual electromagnetic field that causes those in close proximity to bleed uncontrollably when she exerts them. Gillian is understandably dismayed by this power, and becomes enrolled at Paragon, a school of gifted telepathic students, run by Dr. McKeever.

Peter gets a mole, his girlfriend Hester, into Paragon in hopes of making direct contact with Gillian. Before long, Childress and the government order Gillian delivered to their labs. Meanwhile, Gillian has visions of Robin Sanza being experimented upon. Robin also becomes aware of Gillian ... and, due to his programming at Childress’s hands, grows jealous and fearful that he will be replaced.

Hester breaks Gillian out of Paragon, but is killed in the effort. A devastated Peter and Gillian then hop a bus in search of Robin. They find Childress’s country estate, and prepare for a final

confrontation with the boy Peter once called a son. Unfortunately, due to medication and experimentation, Robin has become a psychic monster. He murders his ward, the beautiful Susan, and then kills two agents. After Peter and Gillian are captured by Childress, the nefarious agent sends Peter in to put an end to his out-of-control offspring. Robin is beyond reach, however, and attempts to murder his own father. After a brief conflict, Robin falls to his death from a high window, and a despondent Peter kills himself. Now in the hands of Childress, Gillian awakens in custody, and uses the full breadth of her psychic force to destroy the duplicitous Childress.

COMMENTARY: Many film scholars are dismissive of Brian DePalma's film work because they deplore his continuing emphasis on style over substance. Yet, it cannot be denied that DePalma's films are beautifully and elaborately constructed, and indicative of the formalist artist's deep love of cinema for cinema's sake. For DePalma, a narrative is not the end-all or be-all of a movie. In fact, it is little more than a playground in which he chooses to play. If a viewer can accept that fact, then a DePalma film like *The Fury* is a rewarding viewing experience: a roller coaster of technique, and a muscle-building exercise for an already fit director. On the other hand, if a viewer is more interested in the specifics of a particular story, *The Fury* will come off as rather elaborate and overblown.

Brian DePalma movies are so much fun, and reviewers would probably be wise to leave it at that rather than looking for some thematic depth amidst the fireworks. DePalma's films inevitably remind us why we loved going to the movies in the first place, and that's quite a gift. In *The Fury*, for instance, we get a dramatic musical score (courtesy of John Williams), some good star turns (Douglas and Cassavetes in opposition), a sampling of DePalma's bizarre Godard-like humor, and a plethora of artfully constructed action scenes. What's not to like? In fact, it is not a stretch to view this film as DePalma's *North by Northwest* (1959), since it is about a man on the run, and Cassavetes portrays a James Mason-like villain. The details may be different, but the feel is quite similar: spy vs. spy against a picturesque backdrop (from the Middle East to Chicago).



Amy Irving can't wash the blood off her hands after the telekinetic bloodbath of *The Fury* (1978).

The plot of *The Fury* doesn't make a whole lot of sense. For example, Robin's transition from innocent to monster is barely charted, let alone explained, and Peter's decision to commit suicide seems out of character for so committed and strong a personality. But, despite these logistical gaps, *The Fury* fosters a true sense of exhilaration. For instance, there is a brilliantly layered action sequence in which Douglas escapes the government by car-jacking a pair of local cops. The scene begins with suspense, escalates into humor (as cop Dennis Franz worries about his new car...), and then develops into a well-orchestrated chase. Another sequence, set in an amusement park, also ratchets the suspense way up and there is no doubt that the audience is firmly in the hands of a master. DePalma's gift is not his attention to story details, but his understanding how to fit pieces together, how editing can foster certain feelings in his audience. In fact, a thesis could probably be written about Gillian's escape from Paragon, a perfectly timed and executed set piece that reveals how DePalma uses slow-motion and

editing to link a chain of events, and limn the often unexpected (and unintended) relationship between cause and effect. A sense of exhilaration gives way to excitement, and finally tragedy, as the scene has unsuspected consequences.

The Fury sometimes seems like a shaggy dog story, it's true. The movie has an overdramatic and overcomplicated story all leading to an insanely simple visual punch line: the moment when Gillian "comes alive" and uses her psychic powers to literally blow Childress apart. The whole movie builds to that absurd image, and DePalma makes it the film's punctuation. In a state-of-the-art (for 1978) special effects moment, John Cassavetes appears to explode in a torrent of blood and guts, and DePalma lingers on the moment: cutting it from no less than a dozen different angles. It's spectacular, over the top, funny, and ultimately pointless except as evidence of DePalma's willingness to orchestrate a scene because, purely and simply, it was possible for him to do so. There is something liberating in that. DePalma, like John Carpenter, is a Hollywood maverick, and his films march to the beat of his sensibilities rather than the audience's or the critical community's. Thus the moment when John Cassavetes explodes is simultaneously awe-provoking and a giant expression of contempt for critics. DePalma's achievement is not that this film means something, but that it means nothing, and is still beautifully crafted, awe inspiring, and exciting. He has severed style from substance, and the world can either take it or leave it.

*Halloween (1978) * * * **

Critical Reception

"...a visceral experience—we aren't seeing the movie, we're having it happen to us. It's frightening.... If you don't want to have a really terrifying experience, don't see *Halloween*."—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Movie Home Guide* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993 page 273.

"Not only the scariest horror film since *Psycho* (1960), but also the most imaginatively directed ...

foremost a fascinating exercise in style.”—Danny Peary, *Cult Movies*, Delacorte Press, 1981, page 123.

“A generation later, it’s almost impossible to describe the power of this seminal film on its release—many genre clichés were born of *Halloween*, but they were new in Carpenter’s stunning film. From its amazing music, its technical brilliance (dig the blue lighting!), to its tap into the primal, this film remains a staggering achievement.”—Bill Latham, *Mary’s Monster*, Powys Books.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Donald Pleasence (Dr. Sam Loomis); Jamie Lee Curtis (Laurie Strode); Nancy Loomis (Annie); P.J. Soles (Lynda); Charles Cyphers (Sheriff Leigh Brackett); Kyle Richards (Lindsey); Brian Andrews (Tommy Doyle); John Michael Graham (Bob); Nancy Stephens (Marion); Arthur Malet (Graveyard Keeper); Mickey Yablans (Richie); Brent LePage (Lonnie); Robert Phalen (Dr. Wynn); Tony Moran (Michael age 23); Will Sandin (Michael age 6); Sandy Johnson (Judith Myers); David Kyle (Boyfriend); Peter Griffith (Laurie’s Father); Nick Castle (the Shape).

CREW: A Compass International Pictures Release. Moustapha Akkad Presents a Debra Hill Production, *Halloween*. *Screenplay:* John Carpenter and Debra Hill. *Director of Photography:* Dean Cundey. *Film Editors:* Tommy Wallace, Charles Bornstein. *Music:* John Carpenter. *Associate Producer:* Kool Lusby. *Production Manager:* Don Behrns. *Production Designer:* Tommy Wallace. *Executive Producer:* Irwin Yablans. *Produced by:* Debra Hill. *Directed by:* John Carpenter. *Camera Operator:* Raymond Stella. *Assistant Cameraman:* Fred Victor. *Second Assistant Cameraman:* Krishna Rao. *Set Decorator/Property*

Master: Craig Stearns. *Assistant Art Director:* Randy Moore. *Set Painter:* Richard Girod. *Script Supervisor:* Louise Jaffe. *Assistant Director:* Rick Wallace. *Second Assistant Director:* Jack DeWolf. *Sound Mixer:* Tommy Causey. *Wardrobe:* Beth Rodgers. *Stunts:* Jim Windburn. *Production Assistants:* Barry Bernardi, Paul Fox. *Panaglide:* Ray Stella. *Supervising Sound Editor:* William Stevenson. *Re-recording:* Samuel Goldwyn Studios. *Music Recording:* Sound Arts. *Orchestration:* Dan Wyman. *Music Recordist and Mixer:* Peter Bergren. *Music Coordinator:* Bob Walters. *Music Performed by:* the Bowling Green Philharmonic Orchestra. Filmed in Panavision. *Color by:* Metrocolor. *Titles and Optical:* MGM. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 91 minutes.

P.O.V.

“Critics compare me to Hitchcock, but I know that’s bullshit. If I start taking myself seriously that’s bullshit too. I’m just out to make a good film....”³⁸.
—John Carpenter discusses the critical hyperbole that surrounded him after the release of *Halloween* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: On October 31st, 1963, in the sleepy town of Haddonfield, Illinois, little Michael Myers dons a clown mask, grabs a butcher knife, and murders his older sister, Judith, after she fools around with her teenage boyfriend. After the bloody deed is done, Myers is apprehended—still grasping the murder weapon—by his shocked parents.

On a rainy night—October 30—in 1978, Dr. Sam Loomis and an Illinois state nurse, Marion, drive to Smith’s Grove Sanitarium to transport the now adult Michael Myers to a judicial hearing. When they arrive at the hospital, the evil Myers has already escaped from custody. Having freed all the patients, the silent Myers seizes his first opportunity to steal Loomis’s car and drive away into the dark night.

In Haddonfield on Halloween morning, teenager Laurie Strode drops off the keys to the abandoned Myers house for her father, a real estate agent. She is unaware that Michael Myers has already come home and is watching her. Michael follows Laurie and her sixth grade friend, Tommy Doyle, to school. During English class, Laurie looks out a window and sees a Smith's Grove car parked close by...

Hot on Myers' trail, Loomis finds Michael's hospital gown and a crashed truck near Haddonfield. Loomis warns the authorities in town about the problem, and it is learned that someone has broken into the local hardware store and stolen a Halloween mask ... and a butcher knife. Michael really has come home.

Laurie and her two friends, sarcastic Annie and ditzy Lynda, walk home from school and discuss their Halloween plans. Laurie will be babysitting Tommy Doyle while Annie sits for a neighbor, Lindsey Wallace. Before going out for the evening, Laurie spies the masked Myers, watching her from her neighbor's backyard. As night falls Michael spies on their girls in their respective homes as cult host Dr. Demento plays six straight hours of horror movies on the TV.

Loomis arrives in Haddonfield and discovers that Judith Myers' gravestone has been stolen. He then meets with Sheriff Leigh Brackett, Annie's dad, and they search the abandoned Myers house for signs of the escaped mental patient. They find a half-eaten dog. Loomis then recounts to Brackett how he has studied Michael for a fifteen years, and he considers the boy a soulless monster.

Michael soon kills the Wallace dog, and then, finally Annie (after she has ditched young Lindsey with Laurie). Laurie tries to calm Tommy, who has seen Michael carrying Annie's corpse, and is afraid of the bogeyman. Later in the night, Lynda and Bob show up at the vacant Wallace place and make love. Afterwards, Bob is murdered by Michael, and Myers subsequently strangles Lynda. Upset she hasn't heard from any of her friends, Laurie visits the Wallace house after putting Tommy and Lindsey to bed.

Inside the Wallace house, Laurie discovers a horrifying shrine to Judith Myers. Annie's corpse is sprawled on the bed, the stolen gravestone on the pillows above her dead eyes. The corpses of

Lynda and Bob have also been arranged carefully for maximum effect, and Myers strikes again. Laurie escapes Michael's ambush and flees to the Wallace house. She gets inside only to find Michael has already gained entrance through an open window. Laurie stabs the psychotic killer in the neck with a knitting needle. Though she thinks the horror is over, Michael is still very much alive. Laurie locks the frightened children in a bedroom and hides in a closet. When Michael attacks again, Laurie stabs him in the eyes with a wire-hanger and jabs him in the gut with his own knife.

Believing once again that the horror is over, Laurie sends Lindsey and Tommy down the street for help. Afterwards, Michael is on the move again and he chokes Laurie. Dr. Loomis arrives just in time to shoot Myers at point-blank range six times. Michael falls backwards off a second story ledge and then ... disappears into the night. A terrified Laurie realizes that Myers really is the bogeyman. A shaken Loomis affirms her belief, and out there, in the dark ... Michael waits...

COMMENTARY: Simply phrased, John Carpenter's *Halloween* is one of the greatest horror films ever made, in any decade. It is so terrifying a motion picture that it legitimately deserves to be placed in the same category as Hitchcock's *Psycho*. In some aspects, *Halloween* is even better than the tale of Norman Bates because the horrific aspects of the movie hold up well after multiple viewings, whereas repeats of *Psycho* simply can't match that initial "thrill" of realization that Norman "is" his mother. On virtually every criterion imaginable, *Halloween* is a successful film that transcends its genre (the ever-popular stalk-and-slash). From acting and music to cinematography and screenplay, the film's elements are managed superbly by maverick director John Carpenter.

Why is *Halloween* so effective a journey into horror? That's a question that's been asked many times by many critics, and no one answer is particularly satisfactory. Perhaps the best place to start is with the acknowledgment that *Halloween* makes exceptional use not just of standard horror film techniques, but of the universal elements of "terror" which still cause shivers in all of us, even in the well-lit, "rational" world of the twenty-first century. *Halloween's* power as a genre picture relies most deeply on its understanding

and exploitation of humanity's darkest and most instinctual reactions to frightening scenarios, particularly to the fear of being "hunted" by a more cunning, more powerful, and more savage "animal."

Thus *Halloween*'s bailiwick is mankind's genetic heritage: our primitive origin as a creature of the cave who once, a long time ago, huddled in darkness and feared everything that we could not easily comprehend. A crash of thunder, a rainy night, a lightning storm, shadows emerging beyond the nearest fire, and even an evil force that just won't die... These are all facets of human existence which grab viewers in the most un-evolved places of their psyches. To dramatically bring these deeply buried fears to life, *Halloween* does something that few films have the intellect or the resources to do: It radically deconstructs our modern, technology-driven world.

In *Halloween*, people exist pretty much as they did in the caves of our prehistory. Science, medicine, and psychology, the technological and sociological tools man utilizes today to rationalize and explain scary or vexing elements of life, are useless in the film. Dr. Loomis is an utter failure as a clinical psychologist, unable to repair the breach that has made Michael Myers a monster. He can't understand his patient, not even after 15 years! Importantly, his role in *Halloween* is not that of a doctor, a man of science. Instead, he is a knight, a man who has set out to slay a dragon.

And what of Michael Myers? His "evil" evades any specific pinning down. He functions on a multitude of levels as a character. He is simultaneously bogeyman, child, id, and animal. Take your pick. One thing is certain, however: he cannot be explained in the rational language or lexicon of psychology. He does not suffer from a specific, diagnosable or treatable mental disorder. Not surprisingly then Dr. Loomis describes this particular "patient" just as an ancestor from the dawn of civilization might have voiced concern over a demon: Myers is purely and simply evil. Period.

This is a critical distinction in any analysis of *Halloween* because the idea of "evil" is very much a dead concept in twenty-first century America. "Evil" as such does not exist anymore. The Columbine teens that committed the brutal murders of schoolmates in Colorado

in 1999 are not described as “evil” by the media or psychology experts. Instead, they are the “products of their environment” or “seriously disturbed.” Understandable, relatable motives are ascribed to these boys, and acceptable reasons for “anti-social” behavior are accordingly documented and transcribed. Experts flip through the DSM-IV to find some—*any*—reason why a child would commit murder.

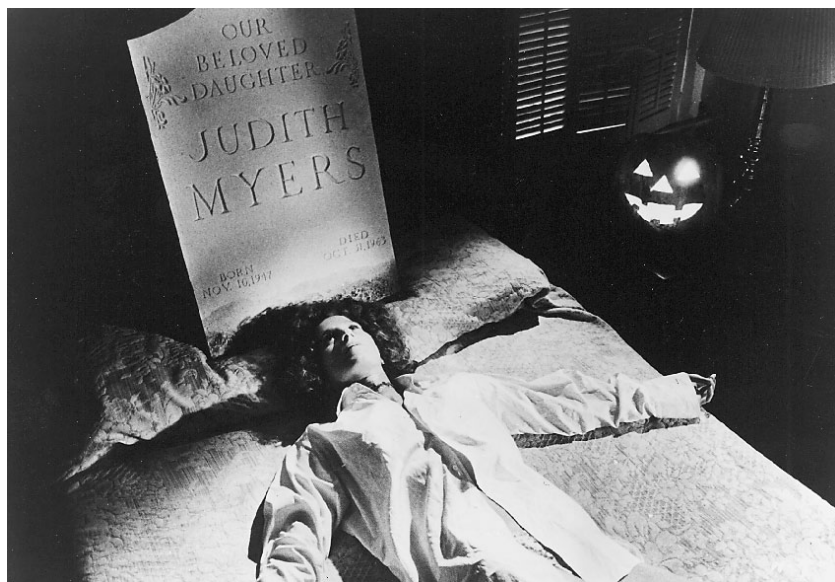
Similarly, those who commit deeds of violence are not denounced as “devilish” entities, but explained away as pitiable, understandable creatures. At the same time that we hate them, we are directed to sympathize with them because of the environment that gave rise to them. They were abused. They were bullied. They were fed up. And so on and so forth, until science has explained away the impulse to kill ... and the evil that gave rise to it. Yet *Halloween*’s Michael Myers is a different breed.

Michael cannot be rationalized or explained. He is shot at point-blank range six times, and yet he survives. Michael commits murder after murder, but no one understands why, or is able to stop him. And Michael is supernatural in at least one sense: he functions beyond the physical laws that restrict us. He easily catches up with you at a brisk walk, even while you *run* away from him, fleeing for your life. If you think of closing a window to protect yourself, Michael has already climbed through that very window and is waiting to catch you as you approach the portal. He possesses all the knowledge and intelligence of his victim, plus a supernatural knowledge too. He is human + 1, a superior predator. And Michael is patient as well. “Inhumanly patient,” as Loomis might say. He watches you and waits, biding his time until he is ready to kill you. Choice is out of your hands, and rests solely within Michael’s inscrutable psyche. He is a god of evil, and he controls his surroundings as dangerously as he wields a knife.

Michael Myers is the perfect embodiment of a primitive evil. No man can escape him, no matter what he knows or how much he thinks he understands. This is a frightening concept for people who consider themselves rational and intellectual, because American society is not accustomed to dealing with the irrational, or worse, the inexplicable.

At least the shark in *Jaws* kills because of a need. It has a biological urge to sate: the need to fill its stomach. Though man may be afraid of the great white shark, he still understands, on some level, what biological forces drive the shark. By contrast, Michael Myers is the walking, stalking embodiment of mankind's fear that, if truth be told, *Homo sapiens* neither controls nor even understands his world. That's why Michael Myers (and thus *Halloween*) is scary. Myers is a ruthlessly efficient killing machine, but exactly what need or pleasure is consummated in the act of killing remains unknown to us. Would a rabbit understand why a hunter pursues it, or the mechanism of the rifle used to end its life? Probably not, and nor do we understand Michael Myers or his motivations.

The victims of Michael Myers do not expect to die at the hands of this monster because they are blinded by false ideas of security and "rationality." There is medicine, science, law, education, and parental protection in this world of ours. Those things give comfort and solace, but in *Halloween*, not one of those protections actually helps. Parents are universally missing in the action, the law is completely ineffective, and science has released the monster that stalks the streets. Thus teenagers Laurie, Annie, Lynda and Bob have no protection from Myers. In fact, they are even worse off than the cavemen of antiquity. At least those early representatives of our species knew to be fearful. They understood that they should be afraid of the things they did not understand. The characters in *Halloween* are "lined up for the slaughterhouse," unprepared and unable to conceive of a reality that includes so irrational a monster.



The Bogeyman's shrine: Annie's corpse (Nancy Loomis) has been prepared for a special "trick" by escaped lunatic Michael Myers in *Halloween* (1978).

Halloween is successful and memorable not just because all of this is easily read in the blank white palette of Michael's face, but because of the stylish, decisive manner in which the movie unfolds. It is a film that is elegant in its simplicity and meaningful in its lean storytelling. Carpenter makes expert use of the first-person subjective camera in the film's famous preamble, but he is just as effective throughout the film, composing satisfying and complex tracking shots, or playing with viewer expectations by "placing" Michael Myers in the background and foreground of many sequences. In one thoroughly frightening moment, Laurie backs up in front of a doorframe. The room beyond her is an impenetrable black. Without warning, Michael's white face fades into view right behind her, and the adrenaline generated is electrifying. It is as if Michael has materialized out of the void, and the audience is terrified by the appearance of the monster. Have no doubt, this is a scary movie that will have you checking dark corners, and afraid to stay in your house alone.

By creating an irrational monster to populate a rational world, John

Carpenter has returned the idea of “doubt” to the discerning horror movie fan. If Michael Myers can exist, so then can all the monsters we imagine under our bed, or in our closets, or down the street. If Michael Myers can exist side by side with radios and television and automobiles, then science really knows nothing, and we haven’t developed at all since those days huddled around the fire, when every call from the wild represented a new, and deadly, danger.



Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis, left) and Michael Myers share a final embrace in John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978).

LEGACY: Though John Carpenter had already directed two interesting, high-quality genre films (*Dark Star* [1975] and *Assault on Precinct 13* [1976]), it was the release of *Halloween* that made this filmmaker a star in his own right. Since its release, he has become one of the most highly respected directors in horror, and a maverick to boot. His films include: *The Fog* (1980), *Escape from New York* (1981), *The Thing* (1982), *Christine* (1983), *Starman* (1984), *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986), *Prince of Darkness* (1987), *They Live* (1988), *In The Mouth of Madness* (1995), *Village of the Damned* (1995), *John Carpenter’s Vampires* (1998), and *Ghost of Mars*

(2001).

If *Halloween* made Carpenter a household name, it did the same for its star, 19-year-old Jamie Lee Curtis. Dubbed the “Scream Queen,” Curtis appeared in *The Fog* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980), *Terror Train* (1980), and *Road Games* (1981), before leaving horror for mainstream pics like *Trading Places* (1983) and *True Lies* (1994). She returned to horror in the duo *Virus* (1998) and *H20: Halloween 20 Years Later* (1998). It has been announced recently that she will play Laurie Strode one more time in the eighth *Halloween* picture, known alternately as *Halloween.com*, *Halloween: The Homecoming*, and *Halloween: Resurrection*.

Beyond these accomplishments, *Halloween* launched a long-lived franchise. *Halloween II* (1981), *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982), *Halloween IV: The Return of Michael Myers* (1988), *Halloween V: The Revenge of Michael Myers* (1989), *Halloween VI: The Curse of Michael Myers* (1996) and *H20* (1998) have made the masked slasher our modern-day equivalent of a Frankenstein or Dracula: a lead “ghoul” who spans the decades, seemingly unkillable.

Halloween is also significant, because like *The Exorcist* and *Jaws*, it was a '70s blockbuster hit that other filmmakers sought to duplicate ... usually without much style or intelligence. As a result of *Halloween's* unexpected success, a plethora of cheap “slasher” films were launched in its wake including (and this is a short list...): *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Mother's Day* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980), *Terror Train* (1980), *Happy Birthday to Me* (1981), *He Knows You're Alone* (1981), *Graduation Day* (1981), *Just Before Dawn* (1982), *My Bloody Valentine* (1981), *New Year's Evil* (1982), *Curtains* (1982), and *Slumber Party Massacre* (1982). You will note that most of these films, like *Halloween*, are set on holidays or special events (Valentine's Day, Graduation Day, New Year's Eve, a birthday, et cetera).

***I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Camille Keaton (Jennifer); Eron Tabor

(Johnny); Richard Pace (Matthew); Anthony Nichols (Stanley); Gunter Kleemann (Andy); Alexis Magnotti (Attendant's Wife); Tammy and Terry Zarchi (the Children); Traci Ferrante (Waitress); Bill Tasgal (Porter); Isac Agami (Butcher); Ronit Haviv (Supermarket Girl).

CREW: Joseph Zbeda Presents a Cinemagic Pictures Production of a Meir Zarchi film, *I Spit on Your Grave*. *Produced by:* Joseph Zbeda, Meir Zarch. *Director of Photography:* Yuri Haviv. *Written and Directed by:* Meir Zarchi. *First Assistant Director:* Michael Penland. *Second Assistant Director:* Beriau Picard. *Cameraman:* Louis McMahon. *Make-up:* Armine Minassian, Joan Puma. *Production Manager:* Bill Tasgal. *Creative Consultant:* Alex Pfau. *Continuity:* Alexis Magnotti. *Location Recording:* Steven Sklar. *Special Effects:* Bill Tasgal, Beriau Picard. *Production Coordinators:* William Kruzycowiski, Lou Kleinman. *Editor:* Meir Zarchi. *Assistant Editor:* Sol Fischler, Pamela Yates, Jim Ettorre, Ray Karticki. *Post-production Supervisor:* Michael Renland, David Schanker. *Sound Effects Editor:* Alex Pfau. *Sound Mixing:* Michael Carton. *Post-production Services:* Montage Film Services. *Mixing Studios:* Magno Sound, Inc. *Titles and Opticals:* Videart Opticals. *Negative Matching:* J.G. Films, Inc. *Color:* Eastmancolor. “*Solo Peduta Abandonnato*” from *Manon Lescaut* by: Giacomo Puccini. *Produced by:* Cinemagic Pictures Inc. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 102 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A beautiful young Manhattanite, Jennifer, drives to rural Connecticut and a summer home to devote attention to her writing career. En route, she stops at a gas station and meets a couple of local guys who show a leering interest in her. Later, Jennifer befriends Matthew, the simpleton delivery boy from the local grocery store. Meanwhile, Matthew, the gas station attendant (Johnny) and two other men, Stanley and Andy, bemoan the fact that there is nothing to do in town. They discuss women and sex

and the fact that Matthew is a virgin. Matthew is especially aroused because, on delivering Jennifer's groceries, he saw her breasts beneath a loose-fitting shirt.

Unaware that the four men are conspiring to arrange an "encounter" with her, Jennifer enjoys the idyllic locale. She writes in a hammock by a lake by day and pounds it out on a typewriter by night. The four men make a racket with a motorboat on one particular night, and then come by her house, whistling and hollering. These actions spur Jennifer to contemplate the loaded gun she has discovered in a drawer in an upstairs bedroom.

The next day, Stanley, Andy, Johnny and Matthew lasso Jennifer's rowboat while she is on the lake, and drag her to shore against her will. They chase her down, and Johnny rapes her. After the ordeal, Jennifer flees into the woods only to be re-captured. This time, Stanley performs a painful act of sodomy upon Jennifer. Beaten, bloodied and bruised, Jennifer staggers home. Once inside, she attempts to call the police, only to discover that her rapists are already inside the living room. This time, the men encourage the mentally retarded Matthew to take a shot at Jennifer. He does so, but is unable to ejaculate. Stanley, the most violent of the four men, beats Jennifer and forces her to perform oral sex on him, but by now the men are worried they have taken too much time. They force Stanley to stop and leave Matthew behind to stab and kill Jennifer. Once the other men have left the house, Matthew is unable to kill Jennifer and leaves her alive, but terribly wounded, on the floor.

As the days pass, Jennifer slowly recovers from the physical and emotional trauma. After two weeks, the four men learn that Jennifer is still alive and punish Matthew for failing them. Meanwhile, Jennifer formulates a plan of vengeance and visits a church to seek forgiveness. Then, with a cool exterior, Jennifer lures Matthew to the woods. She lets him make love to her, but as he ejaculates, she loops a noose around his neck and strings the retarded boy up ... killing him.

Next, Jennifer turns her attention to Johnny. She seduces him and invites him back to her house for a hot bath. Then, when he is completely relaxed, she cuts open his genitals with a rusty knife. As

Johnny bleeds to death in the bathroom, Jennifer sits calmly in a rocking chair and listens to opera music. When Johnny does not show up for work, Stanley and Andy become convinced that Jennifer is involved. Little do they know that their rape victim has orchestrated an assault. Using a motorboat as a lethal weapon, Jennifer engages the enemy on the lake. She puts an axe in Andy's back, killing him instantly, and then disembowels Stanley with the whirring propeller of her motor boat engine.

COMMENTARY: The savage cinema returns to the 1970s with a vengeance in 1978's "rape and revenge" thriller *I Spit on Your Grave*. Recalling *Last House on the Left* (1972), *Straw Dogs* (1971), and *Deliverance* (1972), *I Spit on Your Grave* is the gut-wrenching story of an innocent woman who is wronged in a pastoral setting, the victim of a violent crime. Not unpredictably, she becomes a vigilante and seeks her own peculiar brand of personal "justice."

On a purely "animal" or gut level, *I Spit on Your Grave* delivers the goods by pitting a thoroughly likeable woman against four "freaky," frightening locals. The men are disgusting and obnoxious, and the acts of violence they perpetrate on Jennifer are enough to rouse even the most pacifist of movie-goers into a kind of bloodlust by proxy. In fairness, the film is quite effective in making Jennifer a sympathetic person, and thus in arousing the audience's basic feelings about justice and vengeance. Simply put, we want to see the bastards suffer. Unfortunately, the movie doesn't reach beyond its premise (or its violence) to share with audiences anything meaningful about Jennifer's experience. In *I Spit on Your Grave*, there is nothing psychological, sociological, or worthwhile to walk away with. Though audiences want the rapists to die, there is no real satisfaction in acknowledging that "fact" about human nature. On the contrary, it's an ugly feeling.

"Rape and revenge" can be done quite respectably, when a filmmaker is willing to look at the material honestly and grapple with what it says about humanity. In *Deliverance*, for instance, the city-folk—by virtue of their encounter with unwashed mountain men—learned a lesson about their arrogance and superiority over "country folk." In *Last House on the Left*, director Wes Craven demonstrated how revenge serves no real purpose and is nothing

but an empty venture. The Collingwoods avenged their daughter through bloodshed, but were left destroyed following the experience. In killing the thugs who raped Mari, the Collingwoods merely realized that they had the capacity to act as violently and sadistically as the men they despised. It was a sobering conclusion.

I Spit on Your Grave is simply not in the same class of merit because it offers no theme or point to all the violence and degradation. A woman is raped, and she kills her rapists. Period. End of movie. There's no social context or commentary, and so the film's motives become a little suspect in the end.

For instance, *I Spit on Your Grave* takes special pains to sexualize Jennifer. She is forever garbed in skimpy clothes, and is very much a physical, sensual presence in the film. In sequences that have nothing whatsoever to do with sex, Jennifer's nude, shapely legs are on display, or her nipples are plainly visible. By making her an object of the audience's lust, *I Spit on Your Grave* seems to cast some of the blame for the rape in Jennifer's direction. Boys will be boys, after all, and what could she expect to happen after parading around this little town half-naked? That's a despicable tack to take, but it isn't an improbable reading of the film either.

Even worse, when the movie gets down to dramatizing several (harrowing) sequences of rape, the director does not indulge in equal opportunity nudity. He goes to special pains to hide as much of the men's bodies as possible. A raised knee here, an artfully placed tree-branch or rock there, and so forth, to preserve the sensibilities of the male audience. The point is that the movie wants to tease us with female sexuality on the one hand, and then shy away from male sexuality on the other. The male actors apparently merit a special consideration that Camille Keaton, by virtue of womanhood, does not. She parades through the whole movie with few or no clothes on, and it feels like a marketing decision. A little "tit and ass" will improve the box office numbers, right? If that is the case, then it is pretty despicable to make a movie about a woman being raped, and then ask the audience to enjoy gawking at the victim's body too.

If *I Spit on Your Grave* is an indictment of rape, then why spare the audience any of the nauseating details about the rapists? Why do

they get “coverage” that the victim doesn’t? It’s almost like the movie is victimizing Jennifer all over again. I suppose that the real issue to be crossed is that *I Spit on Your Grave* misses a point that *Last House on the Left* understood implicitly: rape is about power, not sex. In *Last House*, the vicious Krug resorted to rape only after terrorizing his prisoners. First, he forced them to kiss one another, then to urinate in their jeans, and so forth. It was a power trip more than a simple expression of lust or sex. *I Spit on Your Grave* stages no less than four separate scenes around rape (if one includes Jennifer’s seduction and murder of Matthew). These scenes are played as sexually tantalizing at the same time that they are horribly vicious. They are about raising sexual, prurient interest, not about what rape really “means” in the real world.

The movie is suspect in other ways too. Is it at all likely that a woman who has been raped would choose to carry out revenge by again getting intimate with the perpetrators of the crime? Why does Jennifer let Matthew have sex with her again (and finish his business, so to speak), before killing him? Was this just charity? Again, this scene smacks of a soft-core sex movie more than anything else. It aims to tantalize first, even at the expense of Jennifer’s dignity (and rationality). Her actions in this sequence just don’t make sense.

Yet there’s another side of all this too. Though Roger Ebert gave *I Spit on Your Grave* a “no stars” rating, the film is just not that bad. Obviously, Ebert never viewed *Savage Weekend*, or he would have been more charitable! This is a well-shot, well-composed film even if what it says about women and rape is pretty nauseating.

For instance, the film opens with low angle shots gazing up at the skyscrapers of New York City. It looks like a metal jungle, and the film very quickly segues into Jennifer’s escape to the more peaceful “rural” setting of Connecticut. The film then reverses expectations by having the city-dweller abused not in an urban area (where it is expected) but out in the country. For some reason, 1970s movies associate pastoral settings with incredible crimes. *Last House on the Left*’s rape takes place in a forest, as does the “squeal like a pig” interlude in *Deliverance*. Perhaps it is all a reference to Jean Renoir’s *A Day in the Country* (1936), a short film that told the story of

women unexpectedly seduced by nature ... and two farmhands. That film made an explicit connection between man and nature, suggesting that nature provokes men (and women) to commit irrational acts. Uttering the title *I Spit on Your Grave* in the same paragraph as *A Day in the Country* is probably some kind of sacrilege, yet *I Spit on Your Grave* does tap into some fear of the urban American that, out there, in the woods and on the placid lakes, there is danger from the “locals.”

There is one other moment of interest in *I Spit on Your Grave* that elevates it above the “trash” level of *Savage Weekend*. After Jennifer is raped, she continues with her writing. The film thus notes that an act of creation such as writing can be a fruitful response to an act of destruction. When Jennifer re-assembles the pieces of her torn manuscript, she is putting her life back together, as it were. This is as sensitive—and insightful—as the film gets, but at least the scene is there and is strangely touching.

I Spit on Your Grave is a disturbing, ugly film. It is competently produced and acted, and effective on a simplistic, eye-for-an-eye level, but you won't feel good after watching it. It spotlights victimization, vengeance and other negative aspects of humanity, and it does so outside of meaningful moral context. Terrible things happen, and those who commit the terrible things pay in horrible, bloody ways. It means to be a powerful comment about rape and violence, but is instead a message about what passes for entertainment in a cynical age.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...more sheer fun than any movie I’ve seen since *Carrie* and *Jaws*.... The scriptwriter, W.D. Richter, supplies some of the funniest lines ever heard from the screen, and the director, Phil Kaufman, provides such confident professionalism that you just sit back in the assurance that every spooky nuance you’re catching is just what was intended.... For undiluted pleasure and excitement, it is, I think, the American movie of the year—a new classic ... the best movie of its kind ever made.”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, December 25, 1978, pages 48–50.

“Kaufman’s reworking ... turns out to be a colorful, live-wire, science-fiction horror show, pulsating from start to finish with his zest for moviemaking.... The secret, subtle *coup d’état* by the pods serves as a metaphor for the manifold pressures which life brings upon people to abandon that ambiguous blessing, humanity.”—Michael Dempsey, *Film Quarterly*, Volume XXXII, Number 2, Winter 1978–79, page 24.

“Kaufman’s direction is compelling at times but W.D. Richter’s script takes too much time to get rolling. Michael Chapman’s odd photographic style is annoying at times ... but it is often intriguing ... the real star is the atypical score.... Additionally, the special effects men did a fine job in creating the opening sequence and the pods....”—Tom Rogers, *Films in Review*, Volume XXX, Number 2, February 1979, page 120.

“It’s amazing that the same story can say so much in two different decades. This remake found its

horror in a place other than fears of the Red Menace from its 1950s predecessor, [and] tapped into our post-Watergate fear of the government watching us. Donald Sutherland asking a telephone operator how she knew his name (in the days before Caller ID) is still terrifying. Most interesting is the idea that the appearance of complete apathy becomes a survival mechanism—there’s the 1970s in a nutshell!”—Bill Latham, *Mary’s Monster*, Powys Books

“Another outstanding film of 1978 ... a new director Philip Kaufman, took up the story and gave it new life with an effective cast, a moody, gothic use of color, and first-rate special effects, far more graphic and horrifying than those in the original film.”—Douglas Menville and R. Reginald, *Futurevisions: The New Golden Age of Science Fiction Films*, a Greenbriar Book, Newcastle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985, page 59.

“...a triumph. For once, a remake has not trespassed on the original but re-explored, updated and re-defined it for a new audience.”—John Baxter, *Starburst #8*, April 1979, page 4.

“The narrative style of Kaufman’s film, while not revolutionary, is fairly eclectic, and this applies also to the cinematic style—the lighting, scenics and uses of camera.... Throughout the film, the director indulges a certain paranoid-camera viewpoint, an unwholesome, irksome shiftiness.”—Alex Eisenstein, *Fantastic Films*, Volume 2, #2: “Invasion of the Body Snatchers; A Comprehensive Overview.” June 1979, page 45.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Donald Sutherland (Matthew Bennell); Brooke Adams (Elizabeth Driscoll); Jeff Goldblum

(Jack Bellicec); Veronica Cartwright (Nancy Bellicec); Art Hindle (Geofrey); Lelia Goldoni (Katherine); Leonard Nimoy (Dr. David Kibner); Kevin McCarthy (Running Man); Don Siegel (Taxi Driver); Tom Luddy (Ted Hendley); Stan Ritchie (Stan); David Fisher (Mr. Giannia); Tom Dahlgren (Detective); Gary Goodrow (Boccardo); Jerry Walter (Restaurant Owner); Maurice Argent (Chef); Sam Conti (Street Barker); Wood Moy (Mr. Tong); R. Wong (Mrs. Tong); Rose Kaufman (Outraged Woman); Joe Bellan (Beggar); Sam Hiana (Policeman #1); Lee McVeigh (Policeman #2); Albert Nalbandian (Rodent Man); Lee Mines (School Teacher); Robert Duvall (Priest on Playground Swing).

CREW: United Artist Presents a Robert Solo Production of a Philip Kaufman Film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. *Music:* Denny Deitlin. *Editor:* Douglas Stewart. *Production Designer:* Charles Rosen. *Director of Photography:* Michael Chapman. *Screenplay:* W.D. Richter. *Based on the Novel The Body Snatchers by:* Jack Finney. *Produced by:* Robert Solo. *Directed by:* Philip Kaufman. *Production Manager:* Alan Levine. *First Assistant Director:* Jim Bloom. *Second Assistant Director:* Toby Lovallo. *Script Supervisor:* Alice Tompkins. *Production Assistant:* Patrick Burns. *Make-up Effects:* Thomas Burman, Edouard Henriques. *Special Effects:* Dell Rheume, Russ Hessey. *Camera Operator:* Joe Marquette. *Camera Assistants:* Dusty Blauvelt, Allan Blauvelt. *Special Sound Effects:* Ben Burt. *Sound:* Art Rochester. *Supervising Sound Editor:* Bonnie Koehler. *Sound Editor:* John Nutt. *Stereo Sound Effects Re-recording and Design:* Andrew Wiskes, Susan Crutcher. *Re-recorded at:* American Zoetrope, San Francisco, California. *Set Decorator:* Doug Von Koss. *Costumes:* Agnes Anne Rogers. *Assistant Costumes:* Mary Still. *Hairstylist:* Edie Panda. *Make-up Artist:* Bud Westmoreland. *Property Master:* Burt Wiley.

Location Manager: Allan Pettigrew. *Production Illustration:* Sherman Labby. *Music Editor:* Ving Hershon. *Orchestrations:* Greig McRitchie. *Music Production Coordinator:* Phill Sawyer. *Banjo:* Jerry Garcia. *Stunt Coordinator:* David Ellis. *Space Sequence:* Ron Dexter and Howard Preston. *Casting:* Mary Goldberg. *Music Conducted by:* Roger Kellay. *Titles and Opticals:* Pacific Title. *Color Processing:* Deluxe. *Prints:* Technicolor. A Solofilm Company Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 117 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In San Francisco, lab technician Elizabeth Driscoll brings home a strange flowering pod she discovered at a nearby playground. She puts it in water on her night table, beside her husband Geoffrey. The next morning, Geoffrey seems a different man: cold, emotionless, and distant. Elizabeth tells her boss and friend, Matthew Bennell, about Geoffrey's odd behavior, and he suggests she see a psychiatrist friend, David Kibner. Meanwhile, Matthew drops off laundry at a Chinese cleaner's and hears the same complaint from the proprietor: his wife has somehow "changed."

Later, Elizabeth confides in Matthew her fear that Geoffrey is involved in a conspiracy. Having followed him from one end of town to another and watched him meet with strangers, she is sure he is not the man she dated. At Dr. Kibner's book signing party, the psychiatrist informs Elizabeth that her response to Geoffrey is due to a shift in society and the impact of the "me" generation. At the same party, Matthew meets with his friend, writer Jack Bellicec.



(Left to right) Leonard Nimoy, Donald Sutherland and Jeff Goldblum investigate odd Doppelgänger in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978).

At the Bellicec mud baths, something strange happens that night. Jack's wife, Nancy, finds a half-formed corpse on one of the massage tables. When she screams and bumps into Jack, his nose bleeds. Oddly, the corpse's nose starts to bleed too. Jack asks Matthew to look at the corpse, and he comes up with a strange theory: the unformed corpse is becoming an exact duplicate of Jack! Realizing that something is wrong in San Francisco, Matthew races to Elizabeth's house to warn her. She is asleep there ... with a

flowering pod nearby. Matthew abducts Elizabeth from her bedroom after finding that her strange duplicate is growing in the greenhouse. Back at the Bellicec place, Jack's double mysteriously disappears, and Kibner arrives to quiet the panic rapidly growing among Elizabeth, Matthew, Jack and Nancy. Kibner attempts to convince them that what they saw was a mass hallucination, not a body. Kibner promises to contact the mayor on Bennell's behalf but, unknown to the foursome, Kibner has already joined the ranks of the "changed."

Meanwhile, Nancy and Elizabeth take notice of the strange flowers and their proliferation throughout the city. Nancy theorizes that an alien invasion could come from extraterrestrial plants, rather than metal spaceships. At the same time, Matthew tries to cut through the San Francisco bureaucracy and is stymied at every turn, either intentionally or coincidentally. That night, Kibner suggests that Matthew and the others get a good night's sleep. Matthew naps in his garden and the tendrils of an extraterrestrial pod make contact with his skin. Around him, four such pods start to give birth to duplicates of Elizabeth, Jack, Nancy and Matt. Nancy awakens Matthew, realizing that sleep is the period when the deadly transformation is completed.

Soon, most of the city has been changed. The police barricade the street and the four friends flee the house after Matthew destroys the duplicates with an axe. Pursued by the converted "humans," the foursome is cornered as a helicopter approaches. Jack and Nancy divert attention from Elizabeth and Matthew, who seek safety on the streets of San Francisco. There, they mimic the slow, soulless gait of the human duplicates. The sham fails and Matthew and Elizabeth attempt to flee the city in a taxi. They encounter a roadblock after their cabbie turns them in, and are soon back to running for their lives. They hide in Matthew's office and watch outside as the "pod" people organize the distribution of the malevolent pods beyond the borders of San Francisco.

Before long, David Kibner and a converted Jack Bellicec capture Elizabeth and Matthew. They inform the scared humans that memories and identities survive the transformation intact ... but emotions do not. They then give Matthew and Elizabeth sedatives

to help facilitate the duplication process. Matthew and Elizabeth escape, locking Kibner in a freezer and killing the now-soulless Jack.

Running for their lives, Matthew and Elizabeth meet up with Nancy, who tells them she has been hiding among the pods successfully by cloaking her emotions. On the streets, that very plan fails when Elizabeth runs smack into a pod aberration: a dog with the face of a man. Separated from Nancy again, Matthew and Elizabeth run for the docks. Elizabeth sprains her ankle and Matthew leaves her for just a minute when he hears the strains of “Amazing Grace.” It turns out to be a recording, and when Matthew returns he finds Elizabeth converted into an inhuman duplicate. Matthew flees Elizabeth and wreaks vengeance by destroying a pod production facility. Afterwards, he hides from the converted under a pier.

The next day, Matthew goes to work as normal and goes about his business ... until he runs into Nancy Bellicec. She is pleased to see him but, his humanity gone, he unexpectedly lets out the wail of the body snatchers...

COMMENTARY: The 1956 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a classic horror film, evocative of the “red” fear that swept the nation in the days of Eisenhower and McCarthy. In the 1950s, Communism was feared as an inhuman philosophy, lacking individuality and emotion, and “the body snatchers” were a perfect metaphor for the American anxiety that a next door neighbor might be a card-carrying member of the Communist party. He looked the same as you, talked the same as you, but deep down, he was one of the faceless goons who wanted to steal away American liberty.

Though Communism was still alive and thriving two decades later, in the 1970s, when Kaufman’s remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was produced, Americans had grown a bit more mature about those particular dreads. No longer were they looking for bogeymen outside of American borders, or in extra-national political philosophies. Instead, they feared a domestic crisis. The “me” generation and the “free sex” of the disco decade embodied new American principles of decadence and irresponsibility. Society was becoming fragmented, fewer people were going to church,

neighbors no longer seemed to know each other, and so on. The Vietnam War had damaged America's faith in "patriotism" and Nixon's Watergate scandal and ensuing resignation had revealed a government working not for the people, but for the elite. All these social and political changes were the perfect breeding ground for a new invasion.

Or, as Kenneth Von Gunden and Stuart H. Stock wrote in *Twenty All-Time Great Science Fiction Films*:

In a world where the generations seem unable to communicate, where government seems less and less responsive, where business appears unconcerned with the needs of the people, where the media churn out endless hours of entertainment geared to the lowest common denominator, and life grows more confusing each day, the message of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—that we must fight back against the dehumanizing forces around us—seems even more relevant today³⁹.

Accordingly, the remake offers a two-pronged invasion of body snatchers. The first is one directly related to Watergate. The invasion of the "pods" is nothing short of a government cover-up, a conspiracy, designed to deceive and betray the American populace. Matthew Bennell's phones are tapped (or "bugged"), mysterious strangers (like Nixon's plumbers?) gather in groups and keep innocent Americans under surveillance, and everyone (including the mayor of San Francisco) is suspected of obfuscating the truth for some insidious purpose. Even the city's garbage trucks (paid for by taxpayer money!) have been co-opted by the government subterfuge.

Yet even more interesting than the political ramifications of this remake are the social ones. The 1978 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* notes how people can be emotionally alienated from one another, and so selfish that they no longer commit to long-term relationships (and hence marriage). This was a crucial issue in the late '70s because the divorce rate was skyrocketing. As opposed to earlier decades in the twentieth century in which 1 in 5 marriages ended in divorce, in the '70s over 2 in 5 were headed for legal

divorce. People were choosing to make themselves happy first and preserve their union second. This is also quite true in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Elizabeth starts to dislike Geoffrey, and begins feeling a pull towards Matthew despite the fact she is in a “committed” relationship. Naturally, she begins to see flaws in Geoffrey, and starts to worry that “he’s not the same person” she once knew. She is using a perceived change in her would-be spouse to validate her own need to look for someone “better.” Only in this case, of course, Elizabeth is absolutely correct. Geoffrey is no longer Geoffrey.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers charts the beginning of an emotional apocalypse in American culture. At some point in a long-term relationship, everybody feels that a husband or wife has “changed,” especially as passion waxes and wanes. It is interesting that when Elizabeth begins to move emotionally towards Matthew, and away from Geoffrey, he literally withers and dies. Then, in keeping with the disposable culture, he is taken out with the trash. It’s almost as though Elizabeth’s emotional alienation from Geoffrey has turned him into a pod. Whatever made their relationship special has been tossed out into one of those ubiquitous garbage trucks, and what’s left is all surface and no depth.

Truthfully, how often do divorcés demonize their former spouses? Suddenly, a person is different, terrible, inhuman, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* notes this change in a horror context. “He’s changed,” we hear again and again, when one actually suspects it is not the spouse who has changed, but one’s *feelings* for that spouse. Leonard Nimoy’s character, Kibner, puts this in perspective: “People are stepping in and out of relationships too fast ... the family unit has gone to hell ... nobody wants to take responsibility.”

Of course, what is so wicked about this monogamy meltdown is that the emotionless pods are using it, and human selfishness and frailty, to grab a foothold in ’70s America. The aliens use pop psychology, self-help, and other tricks to wheedle their way into the community, simultaneously exploiting and berating humans for their emotional “alone-ness.”

In fact, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* sets up a feud between philosophies. On one hand is human existence: inherently flawed,

selfish ... but filled with love, even irrational love. Then there's the alien culture: perfect, logical, rational ... but strangely cold. Which is better, the film wonders, a world with love and hurt, or a world with reason and no love? For most of us that's a no-brainer, we'll take love with all the strings attached, and that's why *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* feels so immediate and tense. We may be flawed, emotional creatures, but dammit that's our nature, and that's what makes us special. When love is taken out of our equation, what are we? Vegetables. Pods.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is the second great paranoia trip/conspiracy film of 1978, the first being Michael Crichton's *Coma*. Like that film, Kaufman's remake is expertly handled, and it benefits strongly from its casting choices. Leonard Nimoy is pivotal to the success of the film because—as Trekkies—we trust him as a benevolent voice of alien intelligence, rationality and logic. Those very qualities are turned on their head in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Kibner is logical like Spock, but he's working against the human race this time, and that's an unexpected twist. Veronica Cartwright is also perfectly cast. Hysterical, irrational, passionate, and silly, her character, Nancy, embodies everything that is most human about us. As the lovers, Adams and Sutherland are also likable. Their characters are silly, hopelessly in love, and dedicated to one another. One is reminded of Sutherland's warm chemistry with Julie Christie in *Don't Look Now* in his scenes with Adams. Like the Baxters in the Roeg film, this is a couple we want to see survive, and when they are separated there is true pain.

As a thriller, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is assembled with impeccable attention to detail and suspense. Watch, for instance, how director Kaufman charts the progress of the alien invasion by returning (at various stages of the alien operation) to Union Square. The locale begins as a musical, boisterous place, but by the end of the film is silent and lifeless ... drained of vitality. Appreciate the great (disgusting) special effects as fleshly pulsating pods with leather blossoms eject writhing, featureless humans. Perhaps most effectively, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* plays on another universal human condition: sleep. If you sleep in the San Francisco of the pods, you die; you lose your soul. Yet all humans need sleep, and there is a sense of inevitability about the invasion. A person can

choose not to step into the shower (to avoid Norman Bates), or not to go swimming in the ocean (to avoid the great white shark of *Jaws*), but how can we avoid our own built-in limitation: the need to sleep? The greatest compliment one might pay to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is that it will leave you feeling uncomfortable about sleeping. After watching it, and going to bed, you'll feel a pang when your head hits the pillow. What if you close your eyes, fall unconscious, and awake without your soul, without the identity that makes you special to yourself? That's the real crux of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: it is a paean to human individuality.

The aliens implore Matthew and Elizabeth to be reborn into "an untroubled world," but *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reminds us again and again why a troubled world is, ultimately, a human world. Would the alien culture appreciate music, or have composed the song "Amazing Grace"? Would the alien culture understand why Matthew Bennell cuts clippings out of the newspaper?

One of the last scenes of the film is the most masterful in selling this point. A transformed Bennell is seen cutting his clippings (which he has done throughout the movie), but now it is just for appearances. He is simply going through the motions because there is no individuality inside him. But, from the outside, would we know that? Do we know that the person on the bus beside us has a soul? Does that kid walking his dog love that dog, or is he empty inside? It's a basic truth of the human condition that we are trapped, isolated inside our own heads. We don't truly empathize with others, we don't have access to the souls and innermost thoughts of even our best friends. That loneliness is remembered in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and magnified a thousand-fold ... and it becomes paranoia. We start to look at everybody we know in suspicious terms.

When the credits roll at the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, there is no closing music, just silence, because we are now in the land of the pods. Their world is devoid of music, of creativity, and of love, and, terrifyingly, we are there.

*It Lives Again (1978) * * ½*

Critical Reception

“Shot for shot, performance for performance, non-scare for non-scare, *It Lives Again* surpasses the tackiness of the original.... Mr. Cohen wrote, directed and produced the film, which most of the time, has the manner of something improvised in a blind panic.”—Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, May 10, 1978, page C21.

“A marvelous sequel.... [In] the manner, if the not the style of Steven Spielberg, the American’s cinema’s other great contemporary explorer of family life, Cohen merely observes the emotional agonies of his characters as they seek to overcome the contradiction between their quiet family lives and the horrors they have brought forth....”—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 343.

“Although John Ryan is again convincing as the father of the first mutant child, Frederic Forrest and Kathleen Lloyd as the new parents are abysmally stilted, wooden and mawkish. The movie is not the same as the first. It is a good sequel ... as good a sequel as *It’s Alive* could have. Its main attraction though ... is the tykes.”—C.J. Henderson, *Questar* #2, Summer 1978, page 9.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Frederic Forrest (Eugene Scott); Kathleen Lloyd (Jody Scott); John P. Ryan (Frank Davis); John Marley (Mr. Hallory); Andrew Duggan (Dr. Perry); Eddie Constantine (Dr. Forest); James Dixon (Detective Lieutenant Perkins); Dennis O’Flaherty (Dr. Peters); Melissa Inger (Valerie); Victoria Jill (Cindy); Bobby Ramsen (Dr. DeSilva); Glenda Young (Lydia); Lynn Wood (Jody’s Mother).

CREW: A Warner Brothers Communication Company Presents a Larco Production, *It Lives Again*. Associate Producer: William Wellman, Jr. Photographed by: Fenton Hamilton. Additional Photography: Daniel Pearl. Film Editors: Curt Burch, Louis Friedman, Carol O'Blath. Assistant Director: Reid Freeman. Tucson Accommodations Provided Courtesy of: Sheraton Pueblo Inn. Chrysler Cars from: Hart Fullerton Leasing. Location Equipment: P.S.I. Tucson Production Manager: Vincent Fedrici. Color: Technicolor. Filmed with: Panavision Equipment. Special Make-up by: Rick Baker. Production Executive: Peter Sabiston. Unit Manager: Doyle Toliver. Assistant to Producer: Pamela Cohen. Camera Operator: David Lewis. Music: Bernard Herrmann. Musical Adaptation and Additional Music: Laurie Johnson. Conducted by: Mr. Johnson. Based on Characters Created in the Motion Picture *It's Alive*. Written, Produced and Directed by: Larry Cohen. Sound Mixer: Ken Scrivener. Music Editor: Paul Clay. The Songs: "Dreaming" by Bill Kinsley and "All Time Loser" by Bill Kinsley, Roger Craig, Anthony Coates, Derek Cashing. Songs Performed by: the Liverpool Express. A Larry Cohen Film, Distributed by Warner Brothers. M.P.A.A. Rating: R. Running Time: 91 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Expectant mother-to-be Jody Scott enjoys her baby shower, but there is one sullen guest at the party: Frank Davis. Once the father of a mutant baby, Davis has now devoted his life to saving other monstrous children before the authorities kill them. The Scotts do not recognize Davis or know his story, but he tells them of his experience with the mutant child. He has come because the government has been systematically killing the strange children, including one born recently in Seattle. The Scotts are shocked by Davis's report, but even more worried that their unborn child will be an aberration.

Soon, the Scott baby comes and it is the mutant monstrosity Frank Davis expected. Davis and the Scotts save the baby from the

government and transport the child to a place of safety, a special home in Los Angeles. While Jody Scott recovers, Eugene Scott is introduced to the facility where several mutant babies are nurtured. He learns that they are intelligent, with the brain capacity of 21-month-old babies. All bear a striking resemblance, and it is believed they are capable of sexual activity at age five. The first couple has been saved: Adam and Eve. Tending to the babies is Dr. Perry, a deluded egghead.

Meanwhile, Jody's mother betrays her to the government and learns the location of the mutant baby safehouse. The government works with Detective Perkins, who traced the Davis baby, to lead an assault. While the government attacks the compound, the babies break loose and kill Dr. Perry. The babies are murdered, but for the Scott child. Frank takes the baby and seeks escape in the woods. A night watchman kills Frank, and the baby is on the loose.

Baby Scott crashes a child's birthday party, but escapes before the police can catch him. The police set the Scott parents up in a mountain house nearby, believing the child's homing instinct will bring it to its parents. They even give the parents a pistol to kill the baby themselves.

The mutant baby gets into the house after three days of circling. It climbs in through the window, and Jody wants to hold it and love it. Together, the Scotts feed their baby, but the police pump in gas to tranquilize the monster. The baby is shot dead when it attempts to kill again.

Some time later, in San Francisco, Eugene Scott visits an expectant couple, the Baxters, and carries on Frank Davis's legacy of trying to protect the unborn...

COMMENTARY: This author has no idea where director Larry Cohen comes down on the hot-button issue of abortion, but *It Lives Again* is a powerful horror sequel that looks at controversial issues surrounding human reproduction. The film is a low-budgeter, and rather inelegant in execution and resolution, but one thing can't be denied: it has a lot on its mind. As always, Cohen has fashioned a screenplay that is smart and involving, but this time around, it is almost too provocative. The low-budget horror stuff feels cheapjack

next to the director's intellectual debate about morality.

At first blush, *It Lives Again* seems to be a pro-life film. There is crusader Frank Davis, back from the original film, urging women to give birth to their mutant babies, and protecting couples from a government that wants to execute the unborn. Indeed, the government is seen as out of control, legally sanctioning the murder of babies, and that role may be a reflection of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and the legalization of abortion. Doctors are seen to be in league with the government to kill the mutant children, and that too may be a representation of the surgeons who perform abortions, orchestrating the operation because it is legal, but not considering the moral issues of their actions.

Yet, by the same token, *It Lives Again* may be a pro-choice film. Dr. Perry, the man who takes care of the mutant babies, has no idea how to discipline or raise these kids. He is a “do-gooder” and, unfortunately, an idiot. Under his tutelage, the babies (Adam and Eve) develop into more intelligent, more powerful monsters, and eventually run rampant. By allowing the mutant babies to survive and grow stronger, Perry and Davis set the stage for more bloody murders and more death. In this case, the abortion of a “monstrosity” would have definitely saved innocent lives.

And, it could also be said that the government is acting in the best interests of its people in eliminating the mutants, since these babies threaten the human populace, and the very future of the human race.

Even Frank Davis could be seen as a negative role model, because he interferes with the Scott's civil rights. He says he is protecting a woman's right to give birth to her baby, but one senses that he is operating more out of guilt than anything else. This “pro-life” crusader, after all, gave up his own baby to the police and saw it murdered. His guilt about that decision may play a part in his decision to influence other expecting couples. In claiming to protect the liberties of others, Davis is actually seeking to influence the Scotts, and force them to come to the same decision he wishes he made.

Maybe *It Lives Again* is simply a solid metaphor for the abortion

dilemma in general. Few pro-choice advocates think abortion is a “good” thing. Instead, they argue merely that women should have the right to choose what is done with their bodies. And pro-life supporters, though dedicated to saving life, never seem to understand that quality of life is as important as life itself. Is it better for a child to grow up hated, unloved and abused, or to be aborted at birth and spared the pain? These are the major issues on both sides of the debate, and *It Lives Again* raises all of them, without seeming to be firmly on either side.

And that’s good, because as much as the zealous crusaders on either side of the abortion quandary will challenge this notion, there is no easy or satisfactory answer about reproductive rights. In a society that encourages freedom, is the freedom to abort a child too much to accept? And if pro-lifers are so concerned about sparing life, why do so many support the death penalty?

Outside of social ramifications (which are many), *It Lives Again* is an interesting sequel because it realistically and logically expands on the events and situations of the first Cohen film. An epidemic of monster babies is detected, and the government is forced to mobilize to face the emergency. The progression of Davis’s character (again essayed by John Ryan), from father in denial to a crusader for a cause, is particularly interesting, and one wishes he could have survived the sequel to develop further.

Most of all, *It Lives Again* succeeds because it has a different focus than the original. The first film was about blame and explanations. What did we do to ourselves, with our science and our pollution, to give rise to the mutants? Rather than rehashing, *It Lives Again* moves quickly past finger-pointing to ask, what is the moral way to treat this deformed next generation? Are they our children? Do they have a right to exist? Do they represent our death knell as a species, or is this God’s master plan for us?

At times, *It Lives Again* plays more like a serious drama than a horror film, but then at other junctures, it lunges into cheap thrills, bloody set pieces, and silly special effects. This is a mix that isn’t particularly successful, and one has the feeling that Cohen was trying to serve two masters. At the same time that he wrote an intelligent, beautiful script about guilt, redemption, and the moral

choices of a society, he also set out to satisfy the blood-and-guts crowd that wanted more rampaging monster babies and carnage candy. Yet the moral debate in this film is interesting enough that this dyed-in-the-wool horror fan, for one, would have been happy with more debate and less violence, especially since those babies still look rubbery. Horror films are so rarely taken seriously anyway, it seems a shame to saddle a good script, good actors, and a good director with B-movie silliness (like a mutant baby attacking a birthday party...). In this case, the attacking babies just obscure Cohen's intelligent raising of questions, and gives horror-bashing critics the excuse they need to dismiss the whole exercise as schlock.

Jaws II (1978) * * ½

Critical Reception

"The frightening moments in *Jaws II* leave one with exasperation as the audience is manipulated between suspense and nonsense, and the picture is devoid of humor ... a sure fire mass market moneymaker."—C.P.R., *Films in Review*, Volume XXIX, August-September 1978, pages 437–438.

"*Jaws 2* is a curious mixture. Its kids adventure level is the one of battling the shark. Its adult level, attached with patronized knowingness, is the one of Amity trying to revive itself as a money-making resort.... Its third, thoughtful level is the worthwhile one: it lies in the performance of Roy Scheider as the kicked-out police chief, an underdog with a nose for danger and with real tenacity.... Schneider is a born actor, and seems always to be contemplating the temper of things."—Penelope Gilliatt, *New Yorker*, June 26, 1978, page 90.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Roy Scheider (Sheriff Brody); Lorraine Gary

(Ellen Brody); Murray Hamilton (Mayor Vaughan); Joseph Mascolo (Peterson); Jeffrey Kramer (Hendricks); Collin Wilcox (Dr. Elkins); Ann Dusenberry (Tina); Mark Gruner (Mike); Barry Coe (Andrews); Susan French (Old Lady); Gary Springer (Andy); Donna Wilkes (Jackie); Gary Dubin (Ed); John Dukakis (Polo); G. Thomas Dunlap (Timmy); David Elliott (Larry); Marc Gilpin (Sean); Keith Gordon (Doug); Cynthia Grover (Lucy); Ben Marley (Patrick); Martha Swatek (Marge); Billy Van Zandt (Bob); Gigi Vorgan (Brook); Jerry M. Baxter (Helicopter Pilot); Jean Coulter (Ski Boat Driver); Daphne Dibble (Swimmer #1); Christine Freeman (Water Skier); April Gilpin (Renee); William Griffith (Lifeguard); Greg Harris (Diver #2); Coll Red McLean (Red); Susan O. McMillan (Girl Sailor); David Owsley (Boy Sailor); Allan L. Paddock (Crosby); Oneida Rollins (Ambulance Driver); Frank Sparks (Diver #1); Thomas A. Stewart (Assistant Dive Master); David Tintle (Swimmer #2); Jim Wilson (Swimmer with Child); Kathy Wilson (Mrs. Bryan); Herb Muller (Phil Fogarty); Jane Courtney (Select Women); Al Wilde (Select Man #1); Cyprien Dube (Select Man #2); Mary A. Gaffney (Mrs. Silvera); William Green (Irate Man).

CREW: Universal Studios Presents a Richard D. Zanuck/David Brown Production, *Jaws 2*. *Music:* John Williams. *Editor:* Neil Travis. *Production Designer/Associate Producer:* Joe Alves. *Director of Photography:* Michael Butler. *Based on Characters Created by:* Peter Benchley. *Written by:* Carl Gottlieb and Howard Sackler. *Producer by:* Richard D. Zanuck and David Brown. *Director:* Jeannot Szwarc. *Art Directors:* Gene Johnson and Stewart Campbell. *Second Unit Director:* Joe Alves. *Special Mechanical Effects:* Robert A. Matthey, Roy Arbogast. *Live Sharks Photographed by:* Ron and Valerie Taylor. *Set Decorator:* Philip Abramson. *Sound:* Jim Alexander. *Music Sound Mixer:* John Neal. *Music Editor:*

Stephen A. Hope. *Location Casting*: Shari Rhodes/Liz Keigley. *Production Manager*: Tom Joyner. *First Assistant Directors*: Scott Maitland, Don Zepfel. *Second Assistant Directors*: Kathy Mary Emde, Beau Marks. *Film Editors*: Steve Potter, Arthur Schmidt. *Assistant Film Editors*: Freeman Davies, Jr., Michael T. Elias, Robert Hernandez, Sherrie Jacobson. *Technical Advisor*: Manfred Zendar. *Marine Coordinator*: Philip Kingry. *Underwater Cameraman*: Michael Dugan. *Stunt Coordinator*: Ted Grossman. *Script Supervisor*: Bob Forrest. *Camera Operator*: John Fleckenstein. *Costume Designer*: Bill Jobe. *Make-up*: Ron Snyder, Rick Sharp. *Hair*: Phil Leto. *Titles and Opticals by*: Universal Titles. *Wardrobe*: Laurann Cordero, Gil Loe. *Property Master*: Gary Seybert. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *Color by*: DeLuxe. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: PG. *Running Time*: 116 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In the waters near Amity, a scuba diver discovers the wreck of the *Orca*, Quint's boat, and the platform where three brave men (Brody, Hooper and Quint) confronted a great white shark some years earlier. The photographer snaps several pictures of the wreck, and then is killed by a shark. His camera falls to the bottom of the sea...

Meanwhile, in the island community of Amity, Sheriff Brody is late for a gala fund-raising event organized by his wife, Ellen. He shows up for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, overseen by Miss Amity, Tina Wilcox. The next morning, Brody's deputy investigates a drifting ship near Amity and drags up the camera left underwater. While the film inside is developed, a water skier is devoured by a shark, and the skier's boat is destroyed. Brody investigates this strange accident and starts to fear that another shark is hunting in the waters near Amity. When a chewed-up killer whale is washed ashore, Brody's suspicions are confirmed. Terrified, he stalks the beaches of Amity, hoping to protect swimmers, even as the town authorities ignore his warnings.

One sunny afternoon, Brody panics and evacuates a public beach when he believes he sees a shark ... but it turns out to be a false

alarm. Humiliated, Brody seeks to vindicate himself, and the diver's developed film is the evidence he needs. He thinks one picture shows the jaws of a shark, but the town council is unimpressed ... believing the images are underwater bubbles. Brody is fired for his obsession with sharks.

Then, on a bright morning, a group of teens, including Mike and Sean Brody, heads out on a sailing excursion for the old Lighthouse Island. Once at sea, Tina Wilcox's boat is attacked by the great white shark and her boyfriend is killed. When Brody learns his sons have disobeyed his explicit orders to remain on land, he appropriates a police boat and heads out after the teens. In short order, he finds Tina's boat and rescues the catatonic girl. She confirms the presence of a shark in Amity's waters, and Brody sends her home on a passing boat. Hoping to find his sons and the others before the shark strikes again, Brody requests back up from the harbor patrol helicopter.

Far ahead of Brody, the shark strikes the teen flotilla, overturning boats and rafts left and right. Mike is wounded in one attack when the mast of his boat strikes his head. He survives, and two friends try to get him back to land for medical help in the only serviceable boat while the rest of the teens stay afloat in their wrecked sailboats. This small circle of crafts starts to drift towards Cable Junction Island, a power plant that is the last stop before the open Atlantic. The harbor patrol helicopter finds the teens quickly, but joy turns to horror when the shark reappears and pulls the helicopter underwater. In the subsequent chaos, another teen is devoured, but the teens finally make it to the vicinity of Cable Junction.

On his way to save the teens at Cable Junction, Brody runs across Mike and his friends, who inform him that Sean is still in danger. They point him in the right direction, and Brody races for Cable Junction to find the flotilla has become stuck just feet from land. Brody commences a rescue operation, but the horror is not over yet. The shark attacks again and runs Brody's boat aground. In an attempt to grapple the flotilla to land, Brody dredges a power cable up from underwater. This high voltage power-line proves to be the weapon Brody needs to challenge the great white. But first, Brody

must be close enough to jam the cable in the jaws of the beast...

COMMENTARY: How a viewer feels about *Jaws 2* is dependent largely on from which end of the franchise it is viewed. If one is looking at it from the front end of the saga, as a follow-up to Spielberg's original, it is an inferior sequel to a classic. On the other hand, reviewing *Jaws 2* after *Jaws 3* (1983) and *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987) reveals that it is actually a pretty decent sequel, one produced before the franchise hit troubled waters. Original star Roy Scheider is back in action, the production values are pretty high, and there are great and picturesque action sequences set at sea. Director Szwarc manages to sustain suspense rather nicely in some of the more intense moments (particularly when a whole flotilla of recreational boats finds itself under siege from the great white predator). Taken as a whole (and in the proper perspective), this is no slapdash sequel to a blockbuster, but nor is it an inspired, brilliant adventure like its 1975 progenitor. It's just kind of average.

John Williams' famous musical score returns for this 1978 sequel but the "da-dum ... da-dum" cadence has become firmly entrenched in pop-culture by this time (and satirized numerous times), and it feels trite and almost silly in a horror film that is to be taken seriously. And, comparing the opening of the classic *Jaws* with that of its follow-up, the action feels stilted. In *Jaws*, the shark and its wily nature were something of a surprise to the audience. The antagonist turned out to be more than just a hungry fish, and was pretty damned unstoppable. Contrarily, in *Jaws 2*, the audience expects the shark to be meaner and bigger than before, and that is exactly what happens. It's another perfect example of "carnage candy," and of the fact that death sequences in sequels are much more elaborately staged, and with higher body counts. Here, the action strains believability when the shark pulls a *helicopter* underwater. That's a little bit over the top, as if the film takes place in slightly more heightened reality than its predecessor.

Also, *Jaws 2*'s overall quality is lessened by a whole swarm of mostly interchangeable teenagers who serve as little more than fish food. Teens starring in horror films became an established fact from the late 70s forward (especially in the eighties with the *Friday the 13th* saga), but it feels wrong for a *Jaws* film to dwell in that

shallow terrain. The original film gave audiences three great actors (Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss and Roy Scheider) playing complex adult characters with wit, history and personality. The performances were memorable ones.

Jaws 2 provides more nameless, bland teenagers than you can shake a great white shark at. Who has a crush on whom? Who's dating whom? Which one is the older Brody boy? It seems interchangeable and vaguely impersonal, and not very interesting. Still, to give credit where credit is due, it is nice that the teens in *Jaws 2* are not depicted as nasty or mean-spirited. They band together to help one another, and one good-hearted girl even jumps in the shark's path to save Sean Brody ... and is promptly eaten for her heroism. In another surprisingly human moment, one of those nameless, faceless, indistinguishable teens starts to pray aloud. There is no sex and death equation here (as in *Friday the 13th*), and that's nice too. But still, one feels that the film is grasping to attract the younger audience, and that *Jaws 2* could have done with five or six teens instead of eleven or twelve. And what's with the PG rating instead of an R? No doubt the M.P.A.A. rating was an attempt to bring in the whole family and make more money for the *Jaws* saga.

Despite all these problems, there are some good action sequences in *Jaws 2*, and if one enjoys these movies purely for the thrill of seeing fish dine on people, it isn't a disappointment. The spectacular moment when a shark tracks down a water skier (and then her boat), is orchestrated with aplomb, and director Szwarc (of *The Bug* [1975]) brings suspense to a fever pitch when young Mike Brody drifts unconscious in the water during a shark attack. His friends struggle to lift him out of the water as the hungry shark bears down and the efficient editing, together with the helpless nature of the victim, make for chills. All in all, it isn't a bad mix, especially with the immensely likeable Scheider interpreting the material and getting us back into the groove of cutthroat Amity politics and scheming.

The *Jaws* movie series very quickly descends like a shark submerging beneath the waves. The first film is great, the second slightly better than average, the third is flat-out bad, and the fourth is a stinker of gigantic proportions. *Jaws 2* is at the deep end of the

pool, better than its two shallow follow-ups and there is enough of *Jaws*' lingering greatness floating about to make it an entertaining and exciting two hours. Not a classic, but not a disaster either.

***Jennifer* (1978) * ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Lisa Pelikan (Jennifer Baylor); Bert Convy (Jeffrey Reed); Nina Foch (Miss Calley); Amy Johnston (Sandra Tremayne); John Gavin (Senator Tremayne); Jeff Corey (Luke Baylor); Louise Hoven (Jane); Ray Underwood (Dayton Powell); Wesley Eure (Pit Lassiter); Florida Friebus (Miss Tooker); Georgeanne LaPiere (Dee Dee Martin); Sally Pansing (Brenda); Leslie E. King (Tammy); Ruth Cox (Nancy); Lillian Randolph (Martha); Randy T. Williams (Bill); Domingo Ambriz (Jose); Kimberley Eilbacher (Jennifer as Child).

CREW: American International Pictures Presents a Steve Krantz Production, *Jennifer*. *Music Supervisor:* Jerry Styner. *Title Song Composed and Sung by:* Peter Jordan. *Director of Photography:* Irv Goodnoff. *Film Editor:* Duane Hartzell. *Screenplay:* Kay Cousins Johnson. *Story by:* Steve Krantz. *Produced by:* Steve Krantz. *Directed by:* Brice Mack. *Associate Producer:* Don Henderson. *Casting:* Marvin Paige. *Unit Production Manager/First Assistant Director:* Cyris I. Vavneh. *Second Assistant Director:* Jim Inch. *Production Coordinator:* Karen Gilbert. *Location Manager:* Warren W. Smith. *Production Assistants:* Mick McGullough, Fred Fuchs. *Production Designer:* Tom Rasmussen. *Associate Production Designer:* Rafael Arrazda. *Set Decorator:* Bob Breen. *Costumer:* Karen Davis. *Make-up:* Ron Walters. *Hairstylist:* Allen Payne. *First Camera Assistant:* Jacques Haitkin. *Second Camera Assistant:* Ayne Coffey. *Sound Mixer:* Bill Nelson. *Boom Operator:* Jean L. Clark. *Gaffer:* Christ Tufty. *Best Boy:* Steve Posey.

Driver Technician: Michael Rae. *Electrician:* Mike Casey. *Key Dolly Grip:* Alan Goodnoff. *Grip:* David De Gues. *Script Supervisor:* Pam Eddy. *Assistant Editor:* Susan Helck. *Assistant Casting Director:* Horton Willis. *Props/Special Effects:* Charles Nixon, Bruce Steinheimer. *Snake Models:* Jack Shafton. *Zoologist Specialists:* Jim and Beth Dannaldson. *Stunt Coordinator:* Conrad Palmisano. *Sound Effects Editor:* Michael Haikene. *Music Editor:* Ed Norton. *Recording Engineer:* George Porter. *Title Design:* Dale Tate. *Graphics:* Mario Cibelli. *Mobile Production Unit:* Cineturkey. *Prints:* Movielab. *Cameras:* Panavision. *Color, Titles and Optical:* CFI. An American International Release. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Poor Jennifer Baylor lives with her wacky, scripture-quoting father out of the back of a shabby pet shop while she attends school on scholarship at the exclusive Green View Academy. The snobby girls enrolled there treat her badly, calling her a hillbilly and taunting her for her poverty.

In class, Sandra Tremayne, daughter of Senator Tremayne, cheats on an exam. When she is caught, she lies and blames Jennifer. The teacher, Mr. Reed gets the truth from Jennifer, and Sandra is humiliated in front of her classmates. She swears revenge.

Meanwhile, Jennifer's home life gets worse. Her father calls her a miracle child, because when Jennifer was younger she was able to stick her hand in a box of poisonous snakes (before a whole congregation) without being bitten. Jennifer's father wants her to use the "gift" again, but Jennifer is convinced it is evil.

Soon, Sandra Tremayne's nasty tricks begin. She cracks eggs on Jennifer's books, throws her jacket into the gym pool, steals her clothes after a late night swim, photographs her naked without her knowing it, and then posts the pictures on the bulletin board. She even murders Jennifer's favorite cat. Mr. Reed tries to help Jennifer, but she wants to solve the problem on her own. When the snooty principal fires Mr. Reed for taking sides, Jennifer has another wrong to avenge.

Jennifer's only friend, the overweight Jane, is then raped by Sandra's boyfriend, Dayton. That assault is the final straw, and pushes Jennifer to use her strange powers.

When Jennifer is abducted from her bed at 3:00 A.M. by her masked classmates, and forced to run a gauntlet of speeding cars atop a parking garage, she breaks. She calls for "the vengeance of the viper" and suddenly snakes of all shapes and sizes materialize around her. They kill Dayton, Sandy and the rest of her enemies, ending a long year of torment. The next day, Jennifer unleashes the serpents on her principal too.

COMMENTARY: Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Or maybe it's just the quickest way to make a buck at the unsuspecting moviegoer's expense. *Jennifer*, for instance, is as bald-faced a rip-off of Brian DePalma's *Carrie* as one is likely to find in the 1970s. Characters, incidents and motivations from that 1976 hit recur in *Jennifer* with alarming frequency ... only with none of the charm, style or wit that made the Stephen King picture so popular.

Jennifer is so very *Carrie*. *Carrie* had a mother who was a religious fanatic. In a "surprise" twist, Jennifer's father is the religious fanatic of her household. *Carrie*'s only friend at school was a gym teacher (actress Betty Buckley), and Jennifer's only friend at school is (surprise!) a teacher (this time Bert Convy). In both cases, a teenage girl possesses special powers that she is hesitant to use, and in both cases is driven to the breaking point by nasty school girls who are obsessed with humiliating her. In both films we get to see plenty of naked teenage bodies, and in both cases there is a spectacular climax in which revenge is finally achieved. In both films, the evil villain dies in a flaming car after a stylish finale (split screens in *Carrie*; slow-motion photography in *Jennifer*).

The worst thing about *Jennifer* is not its lack of originality. Instead, the main problem is that it encourages society's worst stereotypes about teenagers. In *Jennifer*, the teenagers are all oversexed, irresponsible, drag-racing, smart-aleck head cases. They'll rape and commit murder as easily as they'd pull a practical joke. In *Carrie*, William Katt and Amy Irving gave sensitive performances and created realistic high-school characters (with John Travolta and Nancy Allen playing the more "negative" stereotypes of mischief-

maker and bitch, respectively). The kind of depth and humanity that Katt and Irving conveyed in *Carrie* is completely missing in *Jennifer*. So, where *Carrie* was able to engender some sympathy for characters other than Carrie, the only feeling *Jennifer* engenders is hatred. After watching this film, you will want the Sandy character to get her comeuppance. But once she does, it's something of a letdown. Death was too good for a villain of her magnitude.

There's a subtle difference here. In *Carrie*, Spacek's character was taunted—sometimes in very cruel ways—but the behavior of the teens fit into behavior of teens since time immemorial. It was insensitive and cruel, but not evil. Yes, it was wrong to throw tampons at Carrie in the shower. Yes, it was wrong to tease her relentlessly. And, of course, the pig-blood incident was way over the top—but that was the act of one really nasty girl (Nancy Allen), not the school populace. In *Jennifer*, most of the students are actually evil: they slip into committing murder and rape without a second thought!

Jennifer is a B-movie exploitation of *Carrie*, without that film's technique, sincerity, style or performances. The special effects (with fake snakes...) are as bad as the performances, and the screenplay finds ways to waste Wesley Eure (of *Land of the Lost* [1974–76]) and *Psycho*'s John Gavin.

If you liked *Carrie*, you won't enjoy *Jennifer*.

***Laserblast* (1978) * ***

Cast and Crew

CAST: Kim Milford (Billy Duncan); Cheryl Smith (Kathy Farley); Gianni Russo (Tony Craig); Keenan Wynn (Colonel Farley); Dennis Burkley (Pete Unger); Barry Cutler (Jesse Jeep); Ron Masak (Sheriff); Mike Bobenko (Chuck Boran); Eddie Deezen (Froggy); Roddy McDowall (Dr. Mellon); Rick Walters (Mike Landon); Simmy Bow (Gas Station Attendant); Joanna Lipari (Franny); Wendy Wernli (Carolyn Spicer); Michael Bryar (Hip Kid);

Melinda Wunderlich (Girl on Bench); Franne Schacht (Sheriff's Secretary); Eric Jenkins (Pilot); Janet Dey (Eleanor Duncan).

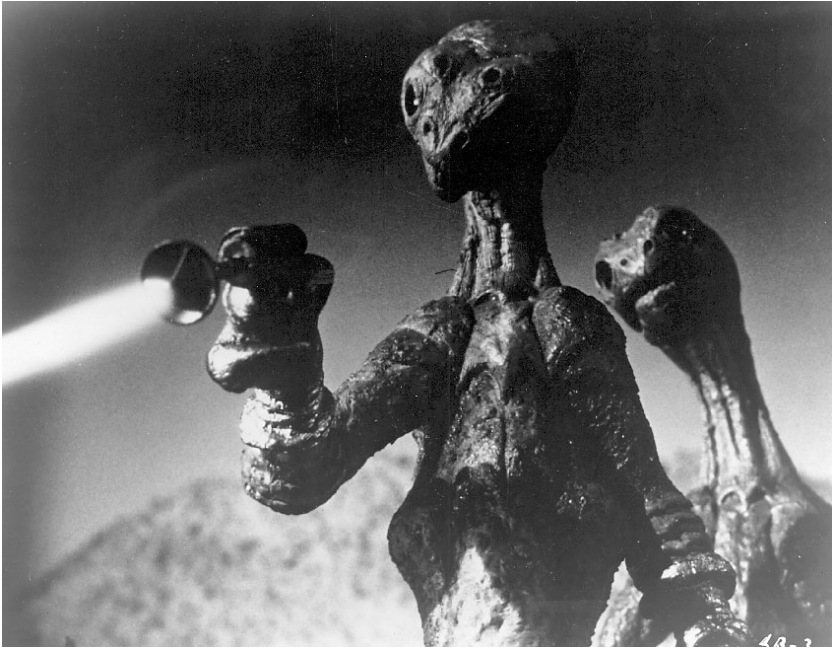
CREW: Samuel Goldwyn Release, the Irwin Yablans Company Presents a Charles Band Production.

Make-up Design: Steve Neill. *Special Effects:* Harry Wolman. *Animation Effects:* Dave Allen. *Director of Photography:* Terry Bowen. *Music by:* Joel Goldsmith, Richard Band. *Edited by:* Jodie Copelan. *Written by:* Franne Schacht and Frank Ray Perilli. *Produced by:* Charles Band. *Directed by:* Michael Rae. *Art Director:* Pat McFadden. *Laser Effects:* Paul Gentry. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A strange, green-skinned creature with a laser rifle on his arm and a glowing pendant around his neck, is hunted down in a barren California desert by two strange-looking aliens. The two aliens destroy their prey, return to their starship, and leave Earth. Unknowingly, they leave behind the laser rifle and the pendant...

Not far away, a sensitive rebel named Billy is upset that his mother is planning to leave town again for a party in Acapulco. When he drives to see his girlfriend, Kathy, her crazy father, the Colonel, won't let Billy inside the house, and starts raving about aliens and UFOs. Billy's day goes from bad to worse when he is stopped by two redneck cops who give him a speeding ticket and generally harass him. Then, Billy is bothered by two high-school bullies at a local gas station.

Finally, when Billy can take no more abuse, he ends up in the desert and discovers the laser gun and the necklace pendant. He attaches the weapon to his arm, activates the pendant, and realizes that he has access to an incredible particle beam weapon of unmatched destructive force.



After phoning home, these E.T.s blast an enemy to smithereens in *Laserblast* (1978).

A government agent arrives in Billy's town to investigate recent UFO sightings at the same time that Kathy and Billy meet up. Kathy is disturbed to see that the alien power unit is causing a radiation burn on Billy's neck. Still, they go to a pool party together, and the bullies try to rape Kathy there. An angry Billy is left feeling powerless. By night, Billy is transformed into a green-skinned monster, and uses the alien weapon to blow up one of the bully's cars.

Concerned about Billy, Kathy takes him to see Dr. Mellon about the strange lump and burn forming on his chest. Dr. Mellon is baffled by the growth, and removes some of the material for biopsy. But on the way to the lab, a transformed Billy kills Dr. Mellon. The police question Billy about the murder, and that night Billy retaliates by killing the redneck deputy and his sidekick with the laser weapon.

Meanwhile, Kathy learns that Billy is transforming into an alien monster, and confides in the government agent, Craig. The

government sends a plane with sharp shooters to kill Billy. He blows apart the plane with the alien weapon, and then goes on a murderous rampage. The strange aliens return, hunt down Billy, and kill him with their own advanced weaponry, this time leaving no trace of their technology behind.

COMMENTARY: It's probably fair to state that *Laserblast* is a late 1970s cult classic, but that description doesn't mean the picture's any good. The fact of the matter is, millions of moviegoers who never would have cared to view a movie called *Laserblast*, ended up packing theaters to see it because it was released shortly after *Star Wars*. It was part of that magical time in American cinema, post-*Star Wars*, when every outer space movie was met with enthusiasm ... even dreck like *Laserblast*, *Starship Invasions* (1977), and *Message from Space* (1978). And that's kind of funny in a way, because *Laserblast* has less in common with the George Lucas blockbuster than it does with *Carrie*, or *Death Wish*. It is the distinctly earthbound story of a disaffected teen who, when looked down on by peers, the law, and even his own family, goes on a killing spree with a particle beam weapon.

Laserblast has two primary claims to fame. Firstly, it features two really neat-looking stop-motion aliens (courtesy of Dave Allen), that are very well remembered today because they look a lot like Spielberg's E.T. The animation is pretty good (for a low budget picture of 1978 vintage), and the aliens are convincing and detailed in a Harryhausen sort of way. The stop-motion scenes elevate *Laserblast* above the stupid "revenge of the teenager" plot that dominates most of the running time.

Secondly, there's a great visual joke in *Laserblast* that has never been forgotten. While riding shotgun in a pothead's van, the rebellious Billy spots a poster for *Star Wars* and immediately blows it to smithereens. For whatever reason, that silly interlude has become the trademark of the film.

But other than those two factors, *Laserblast* is almost a total bust. What on Earth is Roddy McDowall doing in this film? One would have thought that after *Embryo* (1976), he'd learned his lesson about cameos in low budget horror flicks. More to the point, why does Billy kill McDowall's character, Dr. Mellon? In his brief scenes,

McDowall clearly establishes that Mellon is a friend to Billy ... the only one he's got other than Kathy. The answer has to do not with narrative or plotting, but with necessity. Clearly, McDowall's character dies because the actor who portrayed him was available only for a cameo appearance, and had to be gotten rid of somehow. But Mellon's murder makes no sense within the story. There's no reason for Billy to target him.

Laserblast also really stacks its deck against Billy, pitting him against two redneck cops and Eddie Deezen. No wonder the kid goes on a killing spree. After *The Crater Lake Monster* and *Laserblast*, Congress should enact a law proclaiming rednecks should not be permitted as humorous foils in horror films.

There is a lot of demolition in *Laserblast*, and several impressive fireballs and explosives, but the film is simply no good at handling the basics of solid filmmaking. For instance, there is a muddled sense of night and day. One moment, it is daylight and Billy is attacking a passing government plane. The next moment it is pitch black, and the aliens are searching for Billy by night. Then, in the very next sequence, Billy is hitchhiking after the last encounter, and it is still day. Are we supposed to believe that a whole day has passed, or did the film simply get cut out of sequence?

Another strange flaw in continuity occurs at the end of *Laserblast*. The whole movie has taken place in a small, rural California town, a sleepy little place. Yet during the last sequence, Billy is suddenly seen in a major metropolis ... in a neighborhood that resembles Brooklyn. What the hell!? Which city is this, and how did he get there? The obvious answer is that *Laserblast* could probably afford to shoot on a major studio lot for only a day (or even a few hours), and so it lensed the finale of the film there. The problem is, the lot looks like an East Coast city (probably New York), and it matches with none of the background or footage that has been seen throughout the rest of the film's duration.

The best way to enjoy *Laserblast* is to be 12 years old again. At that age, you can get off on the idea of having a laser weapon, and utilizing it to pay back all the nasty bullies and adults who give you a hard time. Any adult will see the film for the dumb wish fulfillment fairy tale it is, and wonder why there has been so little

effort to forge a coherent story out of the mix. How does Kathy's dad know Craig, the government agent? Why do the aliens leave behind the rifle and the pendant in the first place? Why does the weapon turn its owner into a monstrous green-skinned brute? These are questions any discriminating, self-respecting viewer will want to ask in *Laserblast*.

Instead of answers, you'll get some squawking stop-motion aliens and a blown-up poster for *Star Wars*...

***Magic* (1978) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...the film takes forever to establish its premise, and is uninteresting and lacking in suspense to boot. Anthony Hopkins’ fine acting is wasted on a totally boring character.... Richard Attenborough’s direction is so leaden that the odd moments of astute editing and interesting camera movements seem almost accidental.”—William K. Everson, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIX, Number 8, December 1978, page 633.

“The director, Richard Attenborough, grinds along so seriously that there’s no suspense, no ambiguity—just the unpleasantness of watching most of the tiny cast being eliminated.... *Magic* is an atrocious-looking movie; the cinematographer, Victor Kemper, makes every interior look like a cold latrine.”—Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, December 11, 1978, pages 78–79.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Anthony Hopkins (Corky); Ann-Margret (Peggy Ann Snow); Burgess Meredith (Ben Greene); Ed Lauter (Duke); E.J. Andre (Merlin); Jerry Houser (Cab Driver); David Ogden Stiers (Todson); Lillian Randolph (Sadic); Joe Lowry (Club M.C.); Bob Hackman (Father); Mary Munday (Mother); Scott Garrett (Corky’s Brother); Jerry Hauser (Cab Driver); Beverly Sanders (Laughing Lady); L.W. Klein (Maitre d’); Stephen Hart (Captain); Patrick McCullough (Doorman); Michael Harte (Minister).

CREW: 20th Century–Fox and Joseph E. Levine Present *Magic*. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Edited by:* John Bloom. *Production Designer:* Terence Marsh.

Director of Photography: Victor J. Kempert. *Executive Producer:* C.O. Erickson. *Screenplay by:* William Goldman, *Based on his Novel.* *Produced by:* Joseph E. Levine and Richard P. Levine. *Directed by:* Richard Attenborough. *Production Manager:* C.O. Erickson. *First Assistant Director:* Arnie Schmidt. *Second Assistant Director:* Jerald Sobul. *Art Director:* Richard Lawrence. *Set Decorator:* John Franco, Jr. *Costumer:* Ruth Myers. *Script Consultant:* Anne Skinner. *Assistant to Director:* Michael White. *Casting:* Mike Feinberg and Jane Feinberg. *Make-up:* Lee Harmon, Hollie Smith Simmons. *Hair Styles:* Cherie. *Costumers:* Michael Harte, Shirley Strahm. *Consultant Ventriloquist:* Dennis Alwood. *Consultant Magicians:* Michael Baily Lewis Horwite. *Dialect Adviser:* Patrick Watkins. *Sound Mixer:* Larry Jost. *Sound Boom:* Clint Althouse. *Sound Editor:* Jonathan Bates. *Assistant Sound Editor:* Nigel Galt. *Music Editor:* Len Engel. *Dubbing Mixer:* Gerry Humphreys. *Camera Operator:* Robert Thomas. *Camera Assistant:* Bob Marta. *Special Effects:* Robert MacDonald, Jr. *Associate Editor:* Douglas Robertson. *Assistant Editor:* Chris Ridsdale, Dennis Erkel. *Accent Consultant:* Robert Easten. *Script Supervisor:* Lily La Civa. *Property Master:* Sal Sommatino. *Color:* Technicolor, Deluxe, Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: After years of hard times as a two-bit magician, Corky Withers becomes a success. He owes his lucky streak to a new addition to his act: a ventriloquist's dummy named Fats. One night, a TV network executive and Corky's agent watch his performance and plot to get Corky his own special. In the meantime, Corky works in Las Vegas to get experience. Before long, NBC wants Corky for a TV pilot. But, when they insist he take medical tests, Corky refuses on principle and queers the deal.

Instead, Corky flees the city with Fats and lodges at a remote bed and breakfast run by a woman named Peg whom he once loved. Almost immediately, Fats the dummy is "jealous" of Corky's

relationship with Peg. Meanwhile, Corky learns Peg is unhappily married to a man named Duke, who is away on a business trip. Over the next several days, Corky and Peg grow close, but Corky flashes his anger at her when he is unable to perform a simple card trick. Later, Corky and Peg make love, and Corky asks her to run away with him.

Corky's agent, Ben, finds Corky at the bed and breakfast and discovers him locked in a verbal battle with Fats. He suddenly realizes that Corky is schizophrenic. He asks Corky to see someone about the problem, and demands that Corky make Fats shut up for five minutes. Corky is unable to pass the test and after three minutes, Fats is talking again. Desperate, Corky assaults Ben, wielding Fats as a lethal weapon. At Fats' bidding, Corky swims out into the middle of a nearby lake and dumps Ben's corpse there.

The next morning, Duke, Peg's husband, returns home and is immediately suspicious of his wife's relationship with Corky. Fats' shtick puts Duke at ease, but later Duke finds Ben's abandoned Rolls Royce and wonders what is happening. After interrogating Peg about Corky, Duke takes him out on a rowboat to get answers. While fishing, Duke spots Ben's body washed up on shore. He sends Corky to phone the police while he attempts to resuscitate Ben. Duke later searches Corky's cabin, finds Ben's wallet hidden there, and puts together the fact that Corky is a murderer. Before Duke can act on the knowledge, Fats and Corky kill him. Now two bodies go down into the lake.

Unaware of the murders, Peg agrees to leave with Corky. However, she won't leave until she has told Duke of her decision. When Corky plans to leave Fats behind, the dummy threatens to tell Peg everything. Peg and Corky then quarrel, and Fats decides to take a more aggressive role. He informs Corky that it will be just him and Corky till the end. Under the dummy's control, Corky plans to kill Peg. Unable to murder the woman he loves, Corky finally kills himself instead.



Anthony Hopkins and a wooden friend contemplate murder in *Magic* (1978).

COMMENTARY: *Magic* is a human tragedy, a tale of slow-burning madness. It's a Norman Bates story about a man caught in a trap of his own making, and the terrible voices he hears inside his head. But beyond that glimpse of madness, *Magic* explicitly concerns the difference between magic and reality. "Everything can be explained," Corky notes at one point in the film, indicating that there is no magic in the world ... just psychology and schizophrenia. The film constantly plays against that point, and the audience waits ... and waits ... and waits ... to see if the dummy, Fats, will actually evidence "magic" behavior or simply remain inanimate. Sticking to his guns, director Attenborough never gives the audience the pay-off it so deeply desires: the ascendance of the "living" dummy that would vindicate the kindly Corky, and relieve him of responsibility for his ghastly behavior. This is a nuts-and-bolts psychological thriller that keeps threatening to lurch into the supernatural ... but never takes that final step. Some may find it frustrating, others may think it rather clever and restrained.

Martin was George Romero's de-mystification of the vampire film,

and Richard Attenborough's *Magic* has a great deal in common with that film because it deals with the fact that there is no real "magic" in today's world, only sick people who believe there is. It's ironic that the movie is called *Magic*, because there are no illusions, no magic in the film whatsoever, and everything that happens can be explained away as a human psychological disorder. For instance, Fats never actually moves of his own accord, even though Attenborough's camera practically begs him to do so. The audience keeps anticipating the dreadful moment when this lifeless hunk of wood in human form will start to move of its own volition. But this isn't *Child's Play* (1988), and *Magic* isn't that kind of film. Fats is ever present in the film, often in the foreground of shots, because of his influence on Corky's psyche, not because he is a sentient creature. He affects Corky mentally, not as an individual, independent entity.

Magic reminds the viewer just how fragile sanity is. It isn't a very far-fetched film when you consider it concerns a man who develops an alternate personality for a traveling companion who just happens to be a dummy. Are imaginary friends any different? Can't any of us get hooked on an internal conversation or dialogue, posing then answering our own questions? We talk to our cats and our dogs, we talk to passing cars and to traffic signals ... so why not a dummy? Perhaps that is why Corky never feels like a villain. Just as viewers sympathized with Norman Bates in *Psycho*, so do they sympathize with Corky. He's a nice fellow, one worthy of being loved by Peg, and audiences want him to escape the insanity that holds him back. Ultimately—again like Norman—he can't free himself from his murderous alter ego. That's the tragic part. The insanity wasn't his fault, and he never was able to escape it.

At the time it was released, many critics dismissed *Magic*. They complained that the cast was too small, the thrills too minimal. Contrarily, the film is just rather limited in scope, commendably claustrophobic, and Attenborough takes a dignified, artistic approach to the material. For instance, the botched card trick in Peg's kitchen might be seen as a metaphor for sex. Corky is having trouble with it, and Peg fears it is going to "go badly." Corky complains that they both want it to "work so badly." And, when he finally manages the trick, he is exhausted, spent, and sweaty. "I

didn't fail," he repeats, joyful and relieved by his ability to perform. Then, logically the trick leads into a sex scene. For Corky then, there is no difference in his performances. He is afraid of failure in bed, as he is on stage. This insecurity, one feels, is what has led him to create the more powerful personality of Fats.

This notion is even suggested through Attenborough's composition. When Peg and Corky make love in the background of the frame, Fats is seen in the foreground of the shot—still and silent—but nonetheless dominating, larger than life. Corky thinks he has succeeded in love and career, but the inner voice of strength, Fats, is still the dominant personality, and will soon re-assert control.

On a gut level, *Magic* is a scary film because all of us instinctively fear dolls and other inanimate objects in human form. Fats is a weird little troll, an obscene mimicry of the human image, and as such is frightening to us. The idea that this non-living thing is watching us, even though it has no eyes—and *no ability to see*—is disturbing. We transfer all of our fears about dolls onto Fats, and that's exactly what Attenborough wants. He creates a weird tension by playing against expectations. His camera lingers on Fats again and again, sometimes for overly long stretches, and our eyes dart about desperately, looking for any sign of independent movement. This is clever, because if we buy into the fact that Fats is alive, we are essentially letting Corky off the hook for his anti-social tendencies. And in the end, isn't it always easier to find an external monster to blame like a witch, a vampire or a devil doll than to see that monster within ourselves?

By asking us to look for Fats to move, Attenborough is having his audience buy into Corky's sickness. Like Corky, we want to believe in Fats, so we don't have to blame ourselves for our own failings.

The Manitou (1978) * * *

Critical Reception

“...a film so bad that it's almost good.... Fans of the sci-fi movies of the mid-50s will probably delight in the improbable actions, unintentionally funny

dialogue and superb special effects found herein.... Due to its effects and comic potential, the picture may prove somewhat popular.”—Michael Buckley, *Films in Review*, Volume XXIX, Number 4, April 1978, page 242.

“Girdler does well with a three-million-dollar budget, pulling off the more interesting of the film’s effects ... but the more spectacular of concepts ... are uniformly wanting. *The Manitou* was a minor entertainment, but an interesting one.”—Richard Meyer, *SF 2*, Citadel Press, 1984, page 118.

“...basically very silly ... it’s too slow in places; it lacks an internal logic, the dialogue is often embarrassing and the actual direction lacks polish ... but in the long run none of this matters because the movie succeeds in being entertaining. What really saves it and lifts it out of the ordinary run of imitation *Exorcist* movies, is the last 30 minutes ... a mind-blowing barrage of special effects, each one more outrageous than the last.”—John Brosnan, *Starburst #8*, April, 1979, pages 14–16.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tony Curtis (Harry Erskine); Michael Ansara (John Singing Rock); Susan Strasberg (Karen Tandy); Stella Stevens (Amelia Crusoe); Jon Cedar (Dr. Jack Hughes); Ann Sothorn (Mrs. Karman); Burgess Meredith (Dr. Snow); Paul Mantee (Dr. McEvoy); Jeanette Nolan (Mrs. Wingonis); Lurene Tuttle (Mrs. Herze); Hugh Corcoran (McArthur); Ann Newman-Mantee (10th Floor Nurse); Jan Heininger (Wolf); Cindy Stanford (Neighbor); Tenaya (Singing Rock’s Wife); Beverly Kushida (16th Floor Nurse); Charles Kissinger (Anesthesiologist); Filix Silla and Joel Gieb (Misquamacus).

CREW: An Avco-Embassy Release. Herman Weist and Melvin Simon Present a Film by William Girdler, *The Manitou*. *Production Designer:* Walter Scott Herndon. *Second Unit Director:* Nikita Knatz. *Director of Photography:* Michel Hugo. *Filmed in:* Panavision. *Editor:* Bub Asman. *Supervising Editor:* Gene Ruggiero. *Music:* Lalo Schifrin. *Associate Producer:* Gilles A. De Turenne, Jon Cedar. *Executive Producer:* Melvin G. Gordy. *Based on the Novel* The Manitou by Graham Masterton, a Pinnacle Book. *Screenplay by:* William Girdler, Jon Cedar, Thomas Pope. *Produced and Directed by:* William Girdler. *Location Coordinator:* Judie Burkett. *Assistant Associate Producer:* Scott Siegler. *Assistant to Producer:* Jan Heininger, John Woodward. *Production Accountant:* Ken Swerilas. *Optical Effects:* CFI, Van Der Veer Photo Effects. *Produced at:* CBS Studio Center. *Production Manager:* Gilles A. De Turenne. *First Assistant Director:* Bob Bender. *Second Assistant Director:* Alain Silver. *Camera Operator:* William Asman. *First Assistant Camera:* Ron Vidor. *Second Assistant Camera:* Mike Scott. *Script Supervisor:* Victoria Weisbart. *Sound Mixer:* Glenn Anderson. *Costumer:* Agnes Lyon. *Music Editor:* Ken Hall. *Assistant Editor:* Eva Ruggero. *Apprentice Editor:* Jane Heiss. *Make-up Supervision:* Joe McKinney. *Special Effects Make-up:* Tom Burman. *Make-up Artists:* Graham Meech-Burkestone, Tom Burman, Tom Hoerber, JoeMcKinney. *Hairstylist:* Donna Turner. *Photographic Optical Effects Supervisor:* Dale Tate. *Front Screen Design and Supervisor:* William Hansard. *Mechanical Special Effects Design and Execution:* Gene Griff, Tim Smythe. *Sound Effects:* Fred Brown, Michele Sharp Brown. *Property Master:* Dominick Bruno. *Set Decorator:* Cheryal Kearney. *Stunt Coordinator:* John Moio. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 104 minutes.

“I liked it a lot, actually. It had all the right elements of humor and fear in it, and for 1978, the special effects were very good. The director, Bill Girdler, got a little carried away by *Star Wars* toward the end of the film.... But it had all the right wry elements in it that made *The Manitou* what it was in many respects”⁴⁰.—author Graham Masterton reflects on the film adaptation of his novel.

SYNOPSIS: In San Francisco, Karen Tandy is taken to the hospital with a strange growth on her back. Her doctors can’t explain the growth—which appears to be a fetus—and the rate of development alarms them. Concerned, doctors schedule surgery for Karen. Worried about the upcoming surgery, Tandy visits Harry Erskine, a friend and psychic. Trying to soothe Karen’s fears, Harry reads his tarot cards and is disturbed because they portend trouble. That night, Karen and Harry make love, but in the middle of the night she speaks in a strange tongue, as if possessed by a demon.

Karen is prepped for surgery the next day, but the attending surgeon inexplicably goes crazy and cuts his own wrists with a scalpel. At the same time, one of Harry’s clients becomes possessed during a tarot card reading and is levitated down a hallway and tossed down a flight of stairs. Concerned, Erskine talks to Karen’s doctors, who inform him that her tumor is composed of flesh and bone and resembles some kind of parasite. Erskine thinks she’s possessed and asks a psychic friend, Amy, to help. Together they conduct a séance, and during the communing, the face of an angry Indian medicine man materializes out of the séance table.

Erskine and Amy seek out Dr. Snow, an expert in Native American mythology, and learn that they have encountered the manitou of a medicine man, a dangerous spirit who can literally be re-born in another being. Erskine now realizes that Karen is harboring a reincarnated Indian! Snow suggests they fight fire with fire and hire their own medicine man to battle the demonic power developing on Karen’s back. At the same time, the hospital attempts to remove Karen’s tumor again, but this time a medical laser goes crazy when the doctors attempt to x-ray the growth.

Erskine recruits John Singing Rock, a Native American medicine man. He recommends invoking the spirits of the mountains and the wind to stop the Manitou in its tracks. Together, he and Erskine protect Karen in a magic circle. Before long, the Manitou responds with force, and Singing Rock learns that the spirit hoping to be reborn is Misquamacus, the most powerful—and dangerous—medicine man who ever lived. Growing stronger, the Manitou strips an orderly of his skin. Then, the medicine man explodes out of Karen's back, re-born into the 20th century. He is deformed, however, due to his exposure to x-rays.



In *The Manitou* (1978) Susan Strasberg (right) gives birth to a monster out of a tumor on her back while Michael Ansara (far left) and Tony Curtis watch in astonishment.

Erskine and Singing Rock attempt to stop Misquamacus, but he sends the spirit of the Lizard God to stop them. Then, he turns a floor of the hospital into a frozen wasteland by summoning the spirit of the North. More powerful than ever, Misquamacus next summons the “Old One,” the spirit of Lucifer, Satan, the Devil.

Erskine and Singing Rock realize that everything in the universe, machine, man, or natural element, possesses a manitou that can be harnessed to fight Misquamacus. They summon the Manitous of the

hospital computers to fight the evil. Karen, recovering from her strange delivery, also grows powerful, and together the forces of good defeat the evil medicine man.

COMMENTARY: *The Manitou* is a great bad movie. For pure silliness, nothing can top this outing, director William Girdler's final feature. The film is interesting from a historical standpoint because it offers yet another crazy 1970s "delivery" scene. In the decade of Nixon, Ford and Carter, we saw mutant babies (*It's Alive*), aliens gestating inside our bodies (*Alien*), demonic babies (*Beyond the Door*), and, yes, reincarnated, deformed medicine men bursting out of back fat in *The Manitou*. All of these films reveal how audiences in the 1970s were uncomfortable (one might even say queasy...) with the notion that the normal reproductive process could be perverted into a horrific experience.

Yet, attempting to read anything too deep into *The Manitou* is a mistake. Above all else, it's a special effects showcase, and every few minutes Girdler throws a new (and nifty) effect at the audience, hoping it will stick. The crazy pace and Girdler's almost compulsive need to top himself in scene after scene, glosses over some of the film's many improbabilities.

Watching this ridiculously plotted film, this author found a real admiration for the performers involved. They all give great performances in what is, clearly, a schlock movie. Tony Curtis plays a flamboyant psychic and hams it up with relish. He gives a bigger-than-life, theatrical, and thoroughly likeable performance. He's so over the top at points that his character borders on "swishy," but there's real charm in the performance too.

The underrated Michael Ansara—he of booming voice and imposing stature—offers a particularly authoritative and re-assuring presence as Singing Rock, and Burgess Meredith delivers yet another of his trademark eccentric, tic-filled performances. If anyone is slighted in this mix it is Strasberg, who gets little to do but react to the hump expanding near her spine.

And then there are the special effects, which are something to behold for circa 1978. There is a harrowing scene in an operating room as a surgeon slashes his hand with a scalpel, and blood (very

realistically) wells out of the cut. Not long after, an old woman becomes possessed, commences a Native American rain dance, and then is levitated down an apartment hallway. This convincing levitation is followed up by a great stunt as the old lady is tossed down a flight of stairs to her death. Then *The Manitou* gets *really* inventive, conjuring the face of Misquamacus on a glass table during a tense séance. This effect isn't accomplished as one might expect, with superimposition and opticals, but with a pool of black oil substituting for the dark tabletop instead. Thus Misquamacus appears to shape himself out of the table's structure, rather than merely appear above it. It's a creative solution to what could have been a dull moment.

Then there's the frozen hospital ward, the computers gone crazy, the outer space light show, and the laser battles. There's an earthquake, and, of course the birthing sequence itself. None of it makes much sense, but it's a funhouse of film gimmicks that is hard for the open hearted horror fan to resist.

If anything, *The Manitou* reveals how director Girdler, after years of trial and error in low-budget films, was winning the audience over to his particular and peculiar way of thinking. In earlier films such as *Asylum of Satan* (1971), or *Grizzly* (1976) or even 1977's *Day of the Animals*, the audience was never really with the picture. Instead, it laughed at those movies, not with them, and easily recognized that each of the films was a rip-off of sorts. But in *The Manitou*, which is clearly a child of *The Exorcist*, Girdler cloaks his filmic antecedents more successfully, and embodies a passion for the B-movie material that carries over to the viewer. He seems to be enjoying himself, as do the actors, and there's an infectious feeling of fun about *The Manitou* even though it is patently absurd.

On a meat-and-potatoes level, *The Manitou* isn't a very strongly plotted film. Why does Misquamacus pick Karen to inhabit? Why do the machine manitous help mankind? Why is Karen able to grow strong and zap Misquamacus? Why do the real manifestations of the medicine man, such as ice, suddenly vanish without a trace (wouldn't it just melt away?)? The internal logic is not strong, and yet, to Girdler's credit, he finally gets the audience to go along with him on the trip. It's all the more tragic that Girdler didn't live to

direct another film, because it seems he was achieving a new level of competence in *The Manitou*. The audience finally caught the glint in his eye, and that just may be Girdler's legacy as a filmmaker. After years of struggling with bad movies, he finally made a bad movie that was so thoroughly enjoyable that the American populace could buy into it without reservation.

LEGACY: *The Manitou* was a success, but the journey of William Girdler was cut short when the director died in a helicopter crash while scouting locations for his next project.

The Night Daniel Died

Cast & Crew

CAST: Kenny Miller (Daniel); Toni Crabtree (Kim); Jerry Albert (Mike); Herb Goldstein (Old Man).

CREW: *Written and Directed by:* Robert W. Morgan.
Produced by: Ben Morse. *M.P.A.A Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

DETAILS: An unusual, hard-to-track-down horror picture (also known as *Bloodstalkers*), starring Kenny Miller of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1959). It's an arty, melancholy horror film about a whacked-out Vietnam vet on the rampage.

Patrick (1978) * * ½

Cast & Crew

CAST: Susan Penhaligon (Kathy Jacquard); Robert Helpmann (Dr. Roget); Rod Mullinar (Ed Jacquard); Bruce Barry (Dr. Brian Wright); Julia Blake (Matron Cassidy); Helen Hemingway (Sister Williams); Tobert Thompson (Patrick); Walter Pym (Captain Fraser); Frank Wilson (Detective Sgt. Grant); Carole Ann Aylett (Patrick's Mother); Paul Young (Lover); Karen Boogers (Day Desk Nurse); Peggy Nichol (Night Desk Nurse).

CREW: A Monarch Releasing Corporation Feature Film. Antony I. Ginnane Presents a Richard Franklin Film, *Patrick*. *Screenplay by:* Everett De Roche. *Art Director:* Leslie Burns. *Director of Photography:* Don McAlpine. *Production Manager:* Mark Taylor. *First Assistant Director:* Tom Burstall. *Camera Operator:* Dan Burstall. *Editor:* Edward Queen-Mason. *Executive Producer:* William Rayman. *Produced by:* Antony I. Ginnane, Richard Franklin. *Directed by:* Richard Franklin. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 96 minutes.

P.O.V.

“The script for *Patrick* was certainly around long before I ever saw *Carrie*, although the shock ending was certainly a concession to that film. The film cost \$600,00 Australian, which at the time was considered moderately generous. It sounds absurd now....”⁴¹.—director Richard Franklin on the making of *Patrick* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: Recently separated from her husband Ed, Kathy Jacquart is hired by the nasty Miss Cassidy as a nurse at the private Roget Clinic. Kathy’s job is to tend to the comatose patient in room 15: Patrick. He has been unconscious for three years, since murdering his mother and her lover. Now he is a guinea pig in the study of the “gray area” between life and death.

Though catatonic, Patrick becomes aware of Kathy’s ministrations and grows jealous of her new friendship with a doctor, Brian. Bizarrely, Patrick also manifests the ability to move objects with his mind and even tap out messages—telekinetically—on a typewriter. Kathy tells Brian of these unique abilities, and he discusses the mechanisms of the brain, including sense and “the soul” with her, hoping to dissuade her from her bizarre notions. One night, when Kathy returns home to her apartment she finds it ransacked and suspects that her husband, Ed, is responsible. He denies knowledge of the incident.

Soon, Miss Cassidy assigns Kathy permanently to Patrick's care. Later, Kathy reconciles with Ed, but a psychic force inside Patrick responds with jealousy, burning Ed's hands badly. Kathy is also disturbed when she learns that Patrick grows physically aroused whenever she touches him. In just days, Patrick types another message psychically, claiming credit for Ed's burns, and asking for a "hand job" from Kathy. When Ed comes to the clinic for a visit, Patrick traps him in the facility's malfunctioning elevator.

Meanwhile, Dr. Roget begins electroshock therapy on Patrick, and Miss Cassidy fires Kathy. Before she leaves, Kathy sees Patrick one last time. He types her a message warning that someone is trying to kill him. That night Cassidy sneaks into the basement and turns off the power sustaining Patrick. Instead of killing Patrick, however, she awakens him briefly from his coma, and he uses his powers to electrocute her.

The next day, the police investigate the clinic as the origin of a citywide blackout, and find Miss Cassidy fried in the basement. Though Patrick is back in his coma, Dr. Roget is spooked and decides to give the troublesome patient a lethal injection. Patrick rallies his psychokinetic abilities to stop the doctor. Kathy attempts to stop Patrick, but he calls her a slut and then decides she should die too. He uses his powers to force her to inject herself with potassium chloride. Ed escapes from the elevator just in time to save Kathy from taking that fatal action. Patrick is pronounced dead at last, of natural causes.

COMMENTARY: For a movie in which the titular character is catatonic throughout, *Patrick* is a pretty lively piece of genre business. Australian director Richard Franklin would go on to make a splash in America with his later suspense films, including *Psycho II* (1983) and *Link* (1988), but this was the film in which critics started comparing him to the master of the macabre, Alfred Hitchcock. Frankly, *Patrick* isn't *that* good, but it is a solid piece of work that explores the "gray area" between life and death.

Like his '70s brethren, Brian DePalma and John Carpenter, Franklin seems to be a director who is more comfortable with the mechanics of a film's look and feel than the actual weaving of a coherent narrative, or in handling the resolution of his story. In *Patrick*, he

has an almost perfect set-up, and flies with it. A recently single nurse gets a job at a clinic and must tend to a strangely frightening, comatose patient. In learning about him, Kathy (the nurse) must confront her own belief system (regarding euthanasia), stand-up to the policies of the clinic, and face the world at large as a single woman. In other words, she is a perfect horror movie protagonist: vulnerable and pretty much alone.

In the early portions of *Patrick*, this is established with simple, fluid scenes. The sequences setting up the routine of the hospital (in which the other nurses tell Kathy about Patrick) are especially effective in laying the groundwork for the terror to come, and Franklin's camerawork is unobtrusive and elegant. From there, Franklin continues to succeed admirably, and *Patrick's* screenplay probes the idea of consciousness. Is Patrick aware? Self aware? Rumor has it that he flies out his window at night like some kind of vampire....

Unfortunately, *Patrick's* script runs out of inspiration at about the halfway point, and Franklin is at a loss to make it hang together in any but a technical, stylish sense. One sequence, in which a playboy is pulled down into a pool by Patrick's telekinetic "force," looks lifted from *Jaws* (1975), and the climactic pyrotechnics, though efficient, are piped in from *The Exorcist* (but with less effective sound effects...). The longer the movie runs, the less logical the characters' actions seem, and that hurts the film in the end. Why does Miss Cassidy develop a hateful obsession about Patrick, and attempt to kill him after arguing persuasively against euthanasia in an early scene? Why does Dr. Roget do likewise? For just how long is Ed trapped in that elevator? And finally, why does Patrick suddenly expire at the end of the film? He wasn't injected with the potassium chloride, so did he finally die of natural causes? These questions are not small ones, and there's little narrative clarity (or believability) in the final portion of the film. No matter how skillful Franklin is as a technician, the story is muddled.

Still, *Patrick* is not lacking in wonderfully creepy moments. With the ever-present Patrick lying comatose in the background (or foreground) of many compositions, the movie subtly reminds us how easy it is to ignore life right in front of us ... if it's quiescent.

Patrick also explores the common idea that a sixth sense could become more acute for people to whom the other five senses are cut-off. And Patrick himself is a real creeper. Every now and then, he randomly spits at the nurses, or sports an inexplicable erection. Both of these aberrations are indications that he's not as "quiet" or "safe" as he appears, and the film's suspense is generated primarily by the fear that this monster will suddenly awake, like a juggernaut, to wreak havoc. For instance, it's quite a disturbing moment when Patrick's eyes open for the first time, and are seen to be filled with an inhuman malevolence. In all of those moments and expressions of fear, *Patrick* is a solid horror film. If only the plotting made a little more sense.

***Piranha* (1978) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

"...a delightful homage to and satire of the monster-on-the-loose genre ... a diabolical tribute.... *Piranha* could be viewed by veteran fans as a subtle lampoon, but the unjaded could enjoy it as a corking good chiller."—Richard Meyers, *SF 2*, Citadel Press, 1984, page 92.

"Spoofy variation on *Jaws* ... lively, low-budget nonsense."—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 213.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Bradford Dillman (Paul Grogan); Heather Menzies (Maggie McKeown); Kevin McCarthy (Dr. Robert Hoak); Keenan Wynn (Jack); Barbara Steele (Dr. Mengers); Dick Miller (Buck Gardner); Belinda Balaski (Betsy); Melody Thomas (Lauren); Bary Brown (Trooper); Bruce Gordon (Colonel Waxman); Paul Bartell (Dumont); Shannon Collins (Suzie Grogan); Shawn Nelson (Whitney); Richard Deacon (Earl Lyon); Janie Squire (Barbara); Roger Richman (David); Bill Smillie (Jailer); Guich Koock (TV

Pitchman); Jack Pauleson (Boy in Canoe); Eric Henshaw (Father in Canoe); Robert Vinson (Soldier); Hill Farnsworth (Water Skier); Virginia Dunnam (Girl); Bruce Barbour (Man in Boat); Robyn Ray (Screaming Woman); Mike Sullivan (Dam Guard); Jack Cardwell (Brandy); Roger Creed, Nick Palmisano, Bobby Sargent (Stuntmen).

CREW: New World Pictures Presents *Piranha*.
Director of Photography: Jamie Anderson. *Editors:* Mark Goldblatt, Joe Dante. *Music:* Pino Donaggio. *Conducted by:* Natale Massara. *Co-producer:* Chako Van Leeuwen. *Executive Producers:* Roger Corman, Jeff Schechtman. *Screenplay:* John Sayles. *Story:* Richard Robinson and John Sayles. *Produced by:* Jon Davison. *Directed by:* Joe Dante. *Art Direction:* Bill and Kerry Mellin. *Production Manager:* Tom Jacobson. *Special Effects:* Jon Berg. *Creature Design and Animation:* Phil Tippett. *Special Make-up:* Rob Bottin, Vincent Prentice. *Special Properties:* Rob Short, Chris Walas. *Photographic Effects:* Peter Kuran, Bill Hedge, Rick Taylor. *Animation:* Adam Beckett. *Mechanical Effects:* Doug Barnett, Dave Morton. *Special Optical:* Pat O'Neil. *Effects Assistant:* Jools Tippett, Jerome Seven. *Stunt Coordinator:* Conrad Palmisano. *Location Manager:* Harry Wowchuk. *Casting Director:* Susan Arnold. *Key Grip:* Ben Haller. *Wardrobe:* Linda Pearl. *Location Mixer:* Joel Goldsmith. *Assistant Directors:* Charles Eglee, Greg Gears. *Background Director:* Costa Mantis. *Assistant Camera:* Dana Christiaansen, Andy La Marca. *Props:* Kevin and Kathleen Hughes. *Assistant Art Director:* Tim Doughten. *Assistant Editors:* Brenda Balanda, Stacy Russo. *Script Supervisor:* Jeanne Rosenberg. *Set Decorator:* Jeff Avers. *L.A. Coordinator:* David Koyler. *Scuba Instructor:* John Smead. *Assistant Wardrobe:* Jack Buehler. *Boat Captain:* Jack Hicks. *Dog Wrangler:* William Decker. *Production Assistants:* Jeff Hoffman, Ed Tarbutton, Jim Boni, Michael Martin, Robert

Brown. *Second Unit Director*: Dick Lowry. *Second Unit Production Manager*: Tom Hammel. *Second Unit Director of Photography*: M. Todd Henry. *Camera Assistant*: Chris Tufty, Clyde Bryan. *Sound Effects*: Richard Anderson, Dave Yewdall, Terry Eckton. *Dialogue Editor*: Kendreck Sweet. *Foley*: Velue Yewdall. *Post-production Sound*: Ryder. *Laboratory*: MGM. A New World Picture. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 92 minutes.

P.O.V.

“He [Joe Dante] sent me a script which sounded like something I might like to do: play a mad scientist, an ichthyologist who’s working on some sort of crazy fish.... I had some interesting scenes.... I got to swim the river in Austin, Texas; have Karo syrup released underwater as my blood and all”⁴².—Kevin McCarthy, on *Piranha* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: Two hikers decide to cool off in a pool they discover behind a “no trespassing sign” at an abandoned military base deep in the mountains. Their midnight dip turns to terror when they are promptly eaten by piranhas.

A detective named Maggie is hired to find the missing teenagers. She heads to the mountains and teams up with a local boozier, Paul Grogan. He suggests that the kids may have sneaked onto an army base. He takes her there, and at poolside they find evidence of the teens. Paul and Maggie head inside the installation and see that it has been inhabited recently. Hoping to search the pool, Maggie drains it, and inadvertently empties a new breed of hungry piranhas into an open lake!

A crazy old scientist, Dr. Hoak, attacks Maggie, warning her she has just endangered hundreds of people! Now the “razorteeth” (piranhas) are loose, and begin breeding like flies. They have been specifically engineered to survive in any environment, a Vietnam War era holdover, and now they have the power to wreak havoc on the ecosphere.

Paul, Maggie and Hoak raft to town after Hoak crashes Maggie's jeep. Meanwhile, Paul's young daughter, Susie, struggles to pass her solo swim test at a nearby summer camp. Susie is afraid of the water ... and for good reason. Close-by, the freed piranhas attack and devour an old local.

On the raft, Hoak, Paul and Maggie realize the summer camp is vulnerable to attack. En route there, they rescue a boy whose father has been eaten by the carnivorous fish. Hoak heroically saves the boy, but is eaten alive by his own creations. Merciless, the piranhas eat the twine on the raft and tear it apart. The boy, Maggie and Paul make it to shore, but realize there is a bigger danger. Dam personnel are about to spill the riverwater into a resort lake ... an act that will carry the piranha to new water ... and new feeding grounds!

The military are called in to prevent this eventuality, but there is a cover-up. As the military poisons the river to kill the razorteeth, Grogan realizes there is a fork in the river that will lead right to the resort! The military refuses to listen to the warnings, and Paul and Maggie strike off on their own. They head to camp first, but are caught for speeding and confined in a local jail. They escape and save Susie, even as her camp counselors are eaten by piranhas.

At the grand opening of the Aquarena Water Resort, new owner Buck Gardner won't close the operation. The piranhas sweep in and attack a variety of revellers, including a water-skier. Maggie and Paul arrive and plot to spill enough waste into the lake to kill the piranhas. Grogan swims underwater to open a sewer valve and barely survives a close encounter with the devil fish. But Grogan does survive and the piranhas are destroyed in the ensuing rush of pollution.

COMMENTARY: Of all *Jaws*' cinematic offspring, Joe Dante's *Piranha* is, hands-down, the most fun. *Orca* (a variation on *Death Wish* this author calls *Death Fish*...) was ponderous and strange, and *Jaws II* re-imagined Spielberg's classic adventure as a "dead" teenager movie. But *Piranha* is some kind of low-budget masterpiece, a horror film of jaunty good humor, saucy dialogue, and bloody set pieces. Where *Jaws* was a rip-roaring sea adventure in a style Hemingway might have approved of, Dante's *Piranha*

replaces the epic scale (and tension) of the Spielberg film with a healthy dose of tongue-in-cheek wit.

Piranha is a delicate juggling act, balancing humor and thrills in equal proportions. Though Dante relies on the hackneyed “we can’t close the beaches” subplot of *Jaws*, this time at a marine amusement park called Aquarena, he doesn’t ape *Jaws*’ style to any significant degree. Instead, he gently ribs it, letting audiences in on the joke that he knows his film will be derided as a rip-off no matter how skillfully he makes it. Early in the movie, for instance, Heather Menzies is seen playing a *Jaws* video arcade game, and after an attack late in the film, a beachgoer is seen to be reading *Moby Dick*. Wicked touches like those grant *Piranha* a fun feeling, and you just know that any film that casts the snide Paul Bartel as a camp counselor is going to be good for a few laughs...



A stop-motion piranha-dinosaur hybrid is glimpsed briefly in *Piranha* (1978).

But, forecasting his success in genre films such as *The Howling* (1981), Dante doesn’t shy away from delivering the horror goods

either. In *Piranha*, there is a great scene on the river as a swarm of hungry “razorteeth” nibble through the twine holding a raft together, and the make-shift boat comes apart one agonizing log at a time. The scene is played for suspense, as our protagonists have to jump ship and make for shore, and it works splendidly. The piranhas themselves don’t appear very scary or impressive, but Dante seems to understand this too, and utilizes only quick cuts of the piranhas as they attack. Instead, the director focuses a lot on aftermath; on close-ups of limbs being devoured, and water turning blood red. It’s a low-budget solution, but it is gory and convincing enough to maintain the illusion that the piranhas are a menace.

A film like this can live or die by its casting, and Dante has picked his principals well. Heather Menzies (of TV’s *Logan’s Run* [1977] and *Ssssss* [1973]) plays a feisty spitfire of a detective. She’s not exactly a modern heroine, but nor is she the traditional damsel in distress. She’s a 1970s missing link: no shrinking violet, but no Carrie Anne Moss, either. And what can one state about Bradford Dillman? He’s faced sentient chimpanzees (*Escape from the Planet of the Apes* [1971]), cockroaches with fiery flatulence (*The Bug* [1975]), killer bees (*The Swarm* [1978]) and even a demonic Alan Alda (*The Mephisto Waltz* [1971]). Thus he brings an impeccable horror film pedigree to his combat with those genetically engineered piranhas, and seems to relish a role that allows him to lighten up a bit. Kevin McCarthy, of course, is beloved for his role in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and in *Piranha* he plays a full-on nutcase with B-movie glee. Sure, it isn’t the holy trifecta of Scheider-Shaw-Dreyfuss, but these guys have a great time in *Piranha*, and so do we.

Historically and sociologically, *Piranha* is also a perfect time capsule for the 1970s. It’s a rip-off of a popular film (*Jaws*), it brings up that favorite ’70s cliché (science gone awry), and takes potshots at the Vietnam War, local police, the military, business, and government ... all of which are involved in a cover-up (one more bit of fallout from Watergate, no doubt!). The film even—very briefly—deploys stop motion photography to depict its title monster—another facet of seventies horror cinema (*Equinox* [1971], *The Crater Lake Monster* [1977]). Yet despite all the telltale signs of its era, one comes away from a viewing of *Piranha* not with the feeling that it is derivative,

but rather that the film's director, Joe Dante, loves movies ... even the really goofy ones. Here he makes a scary, funny horror picture out of what should have been a dumb rip-off, and thereby assures his reputation as a director of uncanny skill and taste. He could have made a sow's ear, but he's made a silk purse instead.

LEGACY: *Piranha* was enough of a hit that Joe Dante graduated to a very successful directing career in Hollywood. In 1981, he made the best werewolf movie ever, *The Howling* (1981), and he followed that up by directing *Gremlins* (1984) for Steven Spielberg. Among his other hits: *Innerspace* (1987), *Gremlins 2* (1990), and *Small Soldiers* (1999).

***Savage Weekend* (1978) ***

Cast & Crew

CAST: Christopher Allport (Nicky); James Doerr (Robert); David Gale (Mac Macauley); Devin Goldenberg (Jay); Marilyn Hamlin (Marie); Kathleen Heaney (Shirley Sales); Jeffrey David Pomerantz (Greg Pettis); William Sanderson (Otis); Yancy Victoria Butler (Little Girl); Adam Hirsch (Jeremy); Don Plumley (Pool Player); Ben Simon (Lumberman); Geraldine Chapin (Woman at Bar); Rae Chapin (Lumberman); Claude Paulsen (Waitress at Bar); Robert T. Henderson (Bartender).

CREW: An Upstate Production, *Savage Weekend*.
Associate Producers: Claude Duvernoy and A. Norman Leigh. *Editors:* Jonathan Day and Zion Arrahamian. *Music Composed and Conducted by:* Dov Seltzer. *Director of Photography:* Zoli Vidor.
Executive Producer: John Mason Kirby. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 89 minutes.

NOTE: On the print this author reviewed, there were no credits for a director or writer of *Savage Weekend*, though some sources list one David Paulsen as writer/producer/director.

SYNOPSIS: A group of friends leave New York City for upstate to check on the construction progress of their friend's yacht. En route, Nicky, a homosexual, starts a fight with two rednecks at a bar. Later, Nicky and the others (Jay, Robert, Marie and Shirley) arrive at their cabin to find a dead bat pinned to the front door.

Marie, who is recently married to Robert following her divorce from the unstable Greg, starts to flirt with the local lumberjack Mac Macauley. Meanwhile, Robert becomes angry about the progress on the boat and speaks sternly to local hillbilly Otis about it. He assigns Jay to take over from Otis, and Otis is upset about the decision. He visits a grave of a friend and tells him how he'd like to kill the city folk.

Soon, a masked killer arrives in the small town and begins to observe the visitors from the city. After a sexual dalliance with Shirley, Jay is strangled and hanged in a barn. The masked killer then watches as Nicky, Robert, Marie and Ann have a fancy dress dinner. When Robert and Marie go out to look for Jay, the killer enters the house and interrupts Nicky and Shirley as they partner for a seductive dance. The killer sticks a long pin into Nicky's ear, killing him. He carries Shirley down to the basement and impales her on a table saw.

Next, the killer murders Robert, tossing him out a window. This leaves only Marie. She unmasks the killer and learns it is her first husband, Greg, who was discredited and deranged by a political scandal. He takes her to the barn to kill her, but Marie escapes and runs into the woods. Mac Macauley runs to Marie's aid and there is a brief duel between Macauley (armed with chainsaw) and Greg (armed with machete). Macauley is badly injured and about to be killed when Otis shows up and plants the chainsaw in Greg's back, ending the nightmare.

COMMENTARY: *Savage Weekend* is an early, undistinguished entry in the masked-madman-in-the-woods-horror cycle that would find prominence in the 1980s with the *Friday the 13th* films. It is a rudimentary motion picture, bordering on amateurish. It isn't particularly scary, the script is banal, and the characters are mostly stereotypes (the redneck dolt; the queenish gay; the rich bitch, *et al.*). In the plus column, *Savage Weekend* features some intense and

titillating soft-core sex sequences, and that reduces the boredom factor considerably. The killings, with hat pins and a table saw, are also rather diverting in such a dull slash-and-stalk venture.

While viewing the narrative void that embodies *Savage Weekend*'s running time, this author sought to alleviate his existential angst by cataloguing the lack of professional polish on the project. A boom mike dips overhead during an early saloon sequence, then again when the vacationers arrive at a vacant house. Later, the boom playfully re-appears during a bulldozer sequence (twice, actually), and again during the chainsaw woodcutting sequence. More boom mikes dip suggestively into view as Jay and Ann argue in her bedroom after sex. Six rogue booms have been detected so far, and finding them is a lot more fun than anything the script gives the characters to say...

Not much else really exciting happens in the picture, except that for once the redneck (Otis) turns out to be the hero, even though the preamble makes him out to be the killer. Oh, and then there's the really novel motivation for Greg's killing spree. It's a classic: "He couldn't live with impotence..."

The Swarm (1978) * ½

Critical Reception

"A dull plodding disaster pic... In recent years the film has developed a certain cult notoriety, akin to ... *Plan 9 from Outer Space*...."—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 345.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Michael Caine (Dr. Bradford Crane); Katharine Ross (Captain Helena Anderson); Richard Widmark (General Slater); Richard Chamberlain (Dr. Hubbard); Olivia De Havilland (Maureen); Ben Johnson (Felix); Lee Grant (Anne MacGregor); Jose Ferrer (Dr. Andrews); Patty Duke Astin (Rita); Slim Pickens (Jud Hawkins); Bradford Dillman (Major

Baker); Fred MacMurray (Clarence); Henry Fonda (Dr. Walter Krim); Cameron Mitchell (General Thompson); Alejandro Rey (Dr. Martinez); Christian Juttner (Paul Durant); Morgan Paull (Dr. Newman); Doria Cook (Mrs. Durant); Patrick Culliton (Sheriff Morrison); Ernie Orsatti (Duty Officer); Chris Peterson (Hal); Jerry Toomey (Eddie); Don "Rea" Barry (Pete Harris); Elizabeth Rogers (Woman Scientist); Robert Varney (Mr. Durant); John Furlong (Cameraman); Barbara Costello (Receptionist/Nurse); Jennifer Taurins (Nurse); David Himes (Radioman); Mara Cook (Secretary); Joey Eisnachs (Bee Boy); Stephen Powers (Radioman); Chris Capen (Lieutenant); Tony Haig (Officer #2); Bill Snide (Radioman #2); George Simmons (Nurse); Arell Blanton (Sergeant); Trent Dolan (Radio Sgt.); Steve Marlo (Pilot #1); Phil Montgomery (Mechanic); Jim Galant (Doctor); Frank Blair (Himself); Marcia Nicholson (Captain); Arthur Space (Engineer); Chuck Hayward (Standby Engineer); Glenn Charles Lewis (Chemical Warfare Guard); Art Balinger (Radio Announcer); Michael Shechan (Airman #1); Howard Culver (Airman #2).

CREW: An Irwin Allen Production of *The Swarm*.
Editor: Harold F. Kress. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith.
Production Design: Stan Jolley. *Director of Photography:* Fred J. Koenekamp. *Based on a Novel by:* Arthur Herzog. *Screenplay by:* Stirling Silliphant.
Produced and Directed by: Irwin Allen. *Production Executives:* Sidney Marshall, Al Gail. *Production Managers:* Norman A. Cook. *Assistant Director:* Mike Salamunovich. *Second Assistant Director:* Skip Serguine. *Post-production:* George E. Swink. *Special Photographic Effects:* L.B. Abbott. *Costumes Designer:* Paul Zastupnevich. *Executive Assistant to Producer:* Art Volpert. *Casting:* Jack Baur. *Sound Editor:* Allan R. Potter. *Music Editor:* Donald Harris. *Stunt Coordinator:* Paul Stader. *Script Supervisor:* Julie

Pitkanen. *Publicity*: Tony Habeeb. *Production Illustrator*: Tom Cranham, Joseph Musso. *Dialogue Coach*: Steven Marlo. *Production Mixer*: Herman Lewis. *Re-recording Mixer*: Arthur Piantdosi, Les Fresholtz, Michael Minkler. *Music Scoring Mixer*: Danny Wallin. *Orchestrations*: Arthur Morton. *Assistant Film Editor*: Tim Board. *Video Supervisor*: Hal Landaker. *Assistant Art Director*: William O'Brien. *Set Decorator*: Stuart Ross. *Set Design*: Harold Fuhrman, Alfred M. Kemper. *Camera Operator*: Mike Benson. *Assistant Cameraman*: Ed Morey, III. *Property Master*: Ralph Aubert. *Location Manager*: Sheridan Reid. *Make-up Artist*: Tony Lloyd. *Hairstylist*: Ruby Ford. *Special Effects*: Howard Jenson. *Bee Technical Advisor*: Fred Hesper, Ken Harris. *Air Force Coordinator*: Major Ron Gruchy. *Opticals*: Van Der Veer Photo Effects. *Titles*: Pacific Titles. *Negative Cutting*: Dona Bassett. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 156 minutes.

P.O.V.

“You’ve never seen an automobile accident, have you, that didn’t attract an immediate audience? There’s something disturbing in the id of all of us that makes us want to see tragedy up close. We go to automobile accidents, fires or explosions; they attract people, well, just like a queen bee. You take some gigantic feat of derring-do and connect it with what I call the super automobile accident; that’s my basic theory....”⁴³.—Irwin Allen, describing the format of his films on the set of *The Swarm* (1978).

SYNOPSIS: In the American southwest, invading swarms of African killer bees attack a military missile installation and kill most of the men stationed there, downing two choppers in the process. Reinforcements arrive promptly to assess the situation, and General Slater is met by prominent entomologist Bradford Crane. Crane warns that the country is in danger from this insect invasion, but is

challenged by Slater. Captain Helena Anderson, a beautiful doctor, also survives the attack and finds herself attracted to Crane. Meanwhile, the bees attack nearby, killing Mr. and Mrs. Durant, who have taken their son, Paul, out for an afternoon picnic.

In local Marysville, the yearly flower blossom festival is in full bloom when Paul Durant returns to town in shock, warning of the nearby swarm. When Helena and Crane hear of the incident they head to Marysville to question Paul. They also engage the services of a wheelchair-bound immunologist, Dr. Walter Krim. Krim promptly informs Crane that the bees are carrying venomous stingers lethal to humans after just four stings. Crane calls a conference to warn the American populace that the African killer bee has invaded the continental U.S., and that a state of war now exists.

Another swarm is detected near Houston. General Slater wants to attack the bees with chemicals, but Crane vetoes the plan, fearful that the pacifist American honeybee will also be killed, thereby precipitating an environmental cataclysm. While searching for Paul Durant, who has fled the hospital to avenge his parents' death, Helena and Crane spot another swarm. They race from it in a speeding van and warn the Marysville populace that the bees are coming. The town prepares for a disaster ... too late. The swarm attacks a school, killing students and teachers left and right. During the attack, Helena is stung once and sent to the hospital to recuperate.

At the same time, Dr. Krim collects venom samples to develop an antidote for the sting. Fearing another attack, Slater orders Marysville evacuated by train. But the bees are not finished. They attack a train carrying most of the townspeople. Infested with killer bees, the train goes over a hill and explodes, leaving only 17 survivors. Desperate, Crane plots to drop poison pellets on the bees with military helicopters. The plan fails, and in Marysville, Helena is shattered when Paul Durant has a relapse and dies from his bee stings.

The deadly swarms head for Houston, and time is running out. Dr. Krim tests his new antidote by injecting himself with venom (six stings worth), and then his new medicine. The antidote works

briefly, but then Krim goes into respiratory arrest and dies.

Near Houston, the killer bees attack a nuclear power plant. The resulting catastrophe kills 36,422 people in Texas. Humiliated, the president of the United States revokes Crane's authority and puts General Slater and the military in charge of the war effort. Crane refuses to surrender the fight and plots a new counterattack against the bees. It is, however, too late for Houston. Bees encircle the city in a fearsome "occupation." With few alternatives, Slater leads an effort to burn down the city. Soldiers in special suits set about destroying Houston (and the bees) with flame-throwers. At the same time, Helena relapses and nearly dies.

As Houston burns and Slater contemplates his place in the history books, Crane comes up with a final experiment. He pinpoints the mating sounds of the killer bees and then duplicates it artificially. He believes he can lure the swarms with that sound and get them out of Houston. Before this daring plan can be implemented, the bees infiltrate Slater's headquarters and a deadly battle is engaged. Crane escapes with the recovering Helena, but General Slater dies fighting his last enemy.

Dr. Crane races to Dodge Field, and with several military helicopters in tow, oversees the last gambit. An oil slick is poured over the gulf of Mexico, and sound horns (on floatation devices) are dropped into the sea. The mating call of the bees is mimicked, and the swarms flee Houston and descend on the water. When the swarms have arrived, the military bombs them from a missile launcher on shore. Helena and Crane watch as the deadly threat burns away, and Crane warns that this is but a temporary victory.

COMMENTARY: Irwin Allen, the "Master of Disaster" who found cinematic gold in disaster flicks like *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974), hits the end of his decade-long lucky streak with *The Swarm*, an atrocious, laughably bad disaster/horror hybrid about killer bees invading the United States. To put it in terms modern filmgoers will understand, *The Swarm* is the *Godzilla* (1998) of the 1970s: a ridiculously over-hyped product that is all show and no substance, with only a few moments of genuine excitement in its overlong 156 minute running time. In fact, *The Swarm* is so bad that it has become a cult favorite among bad film

lovers ... and for good reason.

It would be hard to catalog all the ridiculous dialogue and foolish plotting that makes *The Swarm* a campy hoot, but here goes:

1. When stung by bees, victims hallucinate that they are in the presence of a hovering, colossal killer bee. There is an hysterical sequence in which Paul Durant imagines a giant bee hovering in his hospital room, and we see it superimposed next to Ross and Caine, who remain calm and unawares.
2. Michael Caine and Richard Widmark, two fine actors, engage in a shouting contest throughout *The Swarm*. Every time they share a scene together in the first half of the film, they shout their lines at each other. Sometimes it is expository dialogue; sometimes merely insults and challenges, but it is all delivered at the top of their lungs.
3. In Fred MacMurray's classroom in Marysville, one particular student is defined by his association with a lollipop. The young moppet is shown to be licking his pop incessantly, for some undisclosed reason. It's an annoying tic that undercuts the rest of the scene. Then, after the bees attack, we understand the "importance" of the lollipop. Irwin's camera cuts to a shot of the boy dead ... with the bees swarming all over his trademark lollipop. It's supposed to be tragic, but the staging is so heavy-handed and bizarre that it's merely funny.
4. At the start of one important action sequence, a bored-looking Caine glances casually at his watch, taps Katharine Ross politely on the shoulder, and then shouts "RUN!" His first responses (the glazed-look, the polite tap) have nothing in common with his shouted utterance, though they are within seconds of one another.
5. The dialogue in *The Swarm* deserves a sub-section all its own. It is so ridiculous, so funny, that some of it must simply be quoted for posterity:

a). FONDA: “All the classical [sic] signs of cardiovascular failure are here.” He probably meant *classic* signs.

b.) WIDMARK (about the bees): “I always credit my enemy with equal intelligence.”

c.) CAINE (thoughtful): “Who would have thought bees would be the first alien force to invade America?”

d.) WIDMARK (questioning his legacy): “You wonder, don’t you? Houston on fire ... will history blame me ... or the bees?”

e.) CAINE (in the ominous tone of a million B-movie scientists): “Did we beat them ... or is this just a temporary victory?”

There are so many other inanities in this film that it would be fun to spend pages and pages on each and every one of them. For instance, Michael Caine has at least five run-ins with the fatal swarm and yet survives every single one of them, even when he must run through a gauntlet of thousands of bees to do so. Less important characters encounter the swarm once and die immediately ... so it’s a case of selective immunity. The bees let the protagonist past, but supporting characters get offed.

Probably the biggest problem with *The Swarm* (besides its stupidity, and the vapid, incredibly dumb performance by Katharine Ross) is that it doesn’t pick an isolated locale and stick to it. The best horror or disaster films of this type are those where the threat is overwhelming, and the setting is limited. In *The Towering Inferno* (1974), the problem was escaping a skyscraper on fire. In *Airport* (1970), a plane trapped in mid-air was the isolated setting. In *Earthquake* (1976), an entire city was under siege when the ground shifted so dangerously.

The same principle holds true in horror films. In *Night of the Living Dead*, the film focused on a few humans trapped in a farmhouse, surrounded by the undead. In *Assault on Precinct 13*, a skeleton crew

of policemen had to defend an abandoned police station from urban gangs in the thick of the night. In all these situations, the crisis was grave, but the focus was a limited one. *The Swarm* ignores this rule, and spreads its canvass too wide. The story hops from military bases out west to the town of Marysville, to Houston, to the coast, et cetera. The more the main characters travel, the less significant the bee threat truly seems. The characters are never really “cornered” by the bees and forced to defend themselves. They can always hop helicopters or trains and get out of Dodge. The wide-open setting just fosters the feeling that there is little at stake, and suspense is diminished, if not downright non-existent.

Another problem is simply bulk. At 156 minutes, there is an awful lot of *The Swarm* to laugh at. That’s part of its ridiculous charm, I suppose. It is clear that Irwin Allen meant this to be a “serious” film about a deadly “environmental” crisis, but the film is so serious, so lacking in humor, that the actors’ gloom ‘n’ doom pronouncements only come out as funny. “My god, Brad! What good is all that science? All that equipment at the base? All those doctors? What good are YOU?” Ross moans melodramatically, caught up in a script that wants to address the big issues but has no idea how to do so.

The more you try not to laugh at Michael Caine as an entomologist, and Henry Fonda as a wheelchair-bound scientist, the more you cackle with glee. By all means, see *The Swarm*. Pop it in your VCR and revel in the absurdities for nearly three hours.

The Toolbox Murders

CAST: Cameron Mitchell (Kingsley); Nicholas Beauvy (Ballard); Aneta Corsaut (Jo Anne); Tim Donnelly (Detective Jameson); Wesley Eure (Kent); Pamelyn Ferdin (Laurie).

CREW: *Directed by:* Dennis Donnelly. *Written by:* Neva Friedenn, Robert Easter and Ann Kindberg. *Director of Photography:* Gary Graver. *Produced by:* Tony Didio. *Editor:* Nunzio Darpino. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 93 minutes.

DETAILS: Popular young TV stars of the 1970s, including Wesley Eure of *Land of the Lost* (1974–76) and Pamelyn Ferdin of *Space Academy* (1977), are trapped in this messy, grotesque psycho-thriller concerning a homicidal killer. Power tools and other home improvement implements are employed by the disturbed psycho (Cameron Mitchell), as he focuses his hatred on women. Gory, unpleasant, and intense.

1979

Alien (1979) * * * *

Critical Reception

“...*Alien*’s special effects and cool direction are superb ... chillingly good.”—Gregory B. Richards, *Science Fiction Movies*, Gallery Books, 1984, page 62.

“*Alien* tries hard to disguise its old shoe plot with all the fineries a big-budget can provide. But Dan O’Bannon’s script leans too heavily on the conventions of horror films from the old days.... The result is a few unsettling shocks, some tasty visuals, and little else.”—Jeffrey Wells, *Films in Review*, Volume XXX, Number 7, August 1979, page 436.

“...a superior visual addition to the genres of both science fiction and horror.”—Douglas Menville and R. Reginald, with Mary A. Burgess. *Futurevisions: The New Golden Age of the Science Fiction Film*, a Greenbriar Book, 1985, page 72.

“...the first *Heavy Metal* style movie, an adult science-fiction horror story wherein arcane monsters metamorphose unpredictably and perform a host of unnatural acts on hapless humanity, invading both steel spaceships and human flesh in myriad unspeakable ways ... an extremely nihilistic film....”—Alex Eisenstein. *Fantastic Films* #22: “Anatomy of a Monster Movie; *Alien* Dissected,” February 1981, pages 43, 94.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tom Skerritt (Captain Dallas); Sigourney

Weaver (Ripley); Veronica Cartwright (Lambert); Harry Dean Stanton (Brett); John Hurt (Kane); Ian Holm (Ashe); Yaphet Kotto (Parker); Bolaji Badejo (Alien); Helen Horton (Voice of Mother).

CREW: 20th Century–Fox present a Brandywine-Ronald Shusett Production of a Ridley Scott Film, *Alien*. *Music:* Jerry Goldsmith. *Conducted by:* Lionel Newman. *Executive Producer:* Ronald Shusett. *Screenplay by:* Dan O'Bannon. *Story by:* Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett. *Produced by:* Gordon Carroll, David Giler, Walter Hill. *Directed by:* Ridley Scott. *Associate Producer:* Ivor Powell. *Editor:* Terry Rawlings. *Director of Photography:* Derek Vanlint. *Production Design:* Michael Seymour. *Art Directors:* Les Dilley, Roger Christian. *Alien Design:* H.R. Giger. *Alien Head Effects Created by:* Carlo Rambaldi. *Special Effects Supervisors:* Brian Johnson, Nick Alder. *Title Design:* Steve Frankfurt Communications, R. Greenburg Associates, Tony Silver Films. *Visual Design Consultant:* Dan O'Bannon. *Conceptual Artist:* Ron Cobb. *Casting (U.S.A.):* Mary Goldberg. *Casting (U.K.):* Mary Selway. *Production Manager:* Garth Thomas. *Construction Manager:* Bill Welch. *Floor Effects Supervisor:* Allan Bryce. *Special Effects Editor:* Peter Weatherly. *Sound Editor:* Jim Shields. *Dialogue Editor:* Bryan Tilling. *Production Sound Manager:* Derrick Leather. *Re-recording Manager:* Bill Rowe. *Re-recording Assistant:* Ray Merrin. *Music Editor:* Bob Hathaway. *First Assistant Editor:* Les Headley. *First Assistant Director:* Paul Ibbetson. *Assistant Directors:* Raymond Becket, Steve Harding. *Production Assistant:* Valerie Craig. *Continuity:* Kay Fenton. *Production Executive:* Mark Haggard. *Costume Designer:* John Mollo. *Wardrobe Supervisor:* Tiny Nicholls. *Make-up Supervisor:* Tommy Manderson. *Make-up:* Pat Hay. *Hairdressers:* Sarah Monzani. *Set Decorator:* Ian Whittaker. *Property Master:* Dave Jordan. *Small Alien Forms Co-designed by:* Richard

Dicken. *Additional Alien Mechanics*: Carlo DeMarchis, Dr. David Walling. *Alien Effects Coordinator*: Clinton Cavers. *Matte Artist*: Ray Caple. *Supervising Model Maker*: Martin Bower, Bill Pearson. *Special Optical Effects*: Filmfex Animation Services. *Special Graphic Effects*: Bernard Lodge. *Stunt Coordinator*: Roy Scammell. *Stunt Work*: Eddie Powell. *Jones Trained by*: Animals Unlimited. *Filmed in*: Panavision. *Color*: Eastman Kodak. *Prints*: Deluxe. *Lighting*: Lee Electrics. *Video Equipment*: Sony. Made at Shepperton Studio Center, England, and at Bray Studios, Windsor, England. Post-production at EMI Elstree Studios. Released by 20th Century-Fox. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 117 minutes.

P.O.V.

“The real genius of the O’Bannon-Ron Schussett story was that they had worked out the details and the plot twists for this story of a space monster that could not be killed without endangering the astronauts’ own life support system. At the same time, this terrible beast is knocking them off one by one, Agatha Christie style—the stuff of real drama”⁴⁴.—*Alien* producer Walter Hill on the story of the film.

SYNOPSIS: The commercial mining starship Nostromo begins its return trip to Earth with seven crewmembers aboard: Captain Dallas, Executive Officer Kane, Warrant Officer Ripley, Science Officer Ashe, Navigator Lambert, and Parker and Brett, ship’s engineers. This group of seven (plus their cat, Jones) is awakened from cryosleep to investigate a strange signal detected by the Nostromo’s computer, Mother. The crew soon learns that the ship is far from home indeed, on the outer fringe near Zeta Reticuli. Furthermore, they must respond to the signal or forfeit their shares in the mission’s profits according to Company regulations. Brett and Parker gripe about the situation, but Dallas gives the order to proceed.

Leaving its payload in orbit, the Nostromo commences a rocky landing on an inhospitable world, LV-426. Some ship systems are damaged upon set down.

While Parker and Brett start repairs, Kane, Lambert and Dallas don spacesuits and head across the planet landscape to locate the source of the signal. As they approach a massive—but wrecked—alien spaceship, Ripley comes to the conclusion that the signal is no S.O.S., but a warning to keep away. It is too late to recall the team, however, and Dallas leads Lambert and Kane into the huge, seemingly organic, derelict spacecraft.

Inside, they discover the remains of an alien inhabitant—an oversized thing with a blown out chest cavity. They also find a massive cargo section containing thousands of leathery objects that appear to be eggs. Kane studies one of the eggs up close and a terrible, crab-like entity leaps out and attaches itself to his face, melting immediately through his helmet plate.

Upon the team's return, Ripley refuses to permit Kane aboard, since he may be contaminated. Science Officer Ashe disobeys procedures and lets the crew in anyway. While Ashe studies Kane and the monstrous thing on his face, the remainder of the crew watches through the infirmary windows. Ashe is unable to remove the beast without injury to Kane, and determines the thing has injected a tube down Kane's throat, possibly feeding him air. At Dallas's order, Ashe employs a laser to cut the thing off, but it bleeds acid. This molecular acid is so strong it bleeds through three decks of the Nostromo before weakening.

With repairs on the Nostromo finished, it lifts off and resumes its space journey. En route to Earth, the face-hugger disappears from Kane's face and is discovered dead in the infirmary. Though Ashe conducts an autopsy, there seems to be very little analysis of value.

Soon after, Kane awakens, apparently recovered from his strange experience. But over dinner, Kane becomes violently ill. He spasms, and a blunt-headed monstrosity bursts from his stomach, killing him during an obscene birthing process. The creature escapes into the bowels of the Nostromo, leaving the others to theorize that the face-hugger laid an egg inside Kane's throat. After a brief funeral,

the crew hunts the beast. Next, Brent is killed by the alien, now 9 feet tall, as he searches for Jones.

Dallas concocts a plan to drive the alien out of the Nostromo's vent system with a flamethrower, but does not survive the attempt and, like Brett, his body is not found. Made suspicious by Ashe's failure to neutralize the alien, Ripley consults Mother and learns that Ashe has been operating under secret orders from the Company to protect the alien. The crew is considered expendable. During a fight with Ashe, it is revealed that he is actually a Company robot. After damaging Ashe, Parker re-activates him and they learn from the machine that the Company wants the alien for its weapons division. With no choice, Ripley decides to destroy the Nostromo and flee with Parker, Lambert and Jones to the escape shuttle, Narcissus.

Parker and Lambert are killed during an encounter with the Alien, leaving Ripley and Jones the cat the only Nostromo survivors. Ripley activates the self-destruct system and escapes in the shuttle. From a great distance, she watches as the Nostromo flares up like an exploding star. Unfortunately, the alien is hiding aboard the shuttle. In a final confrontation, Ripley adorns a spacesuit, locks up Jones in a cryotube, and blows the impossible-to-kill alien into deep space.



(Left to right) Brett (Harry Dean Stanton), Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), and Parker (Yaphet Kotto) hunt a deadly interloper in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979).

COMMENTARY: Mainstream horror cinema evolved on the day of *Alien*'s premiere in 1979. In depicting the multi-part life cycle of an unkillable extra-terrestrial entity, *Alien* went further—and showed more—than any Hollywood horror film in history. The critical scene involved a “chest-burster,” an alien that, after growing in John Hurt's tummy, pushed its way violently out of his body, leaving a trail of broken bones, blood and entrails. Today, one can hardly imagine how powerful this sequence was to unaware viewers who had been expecting nothing more than a space movie like *Star Wars*, or your run-of-the-mill “monster in space” flick. During *Alien*'s opening weekend, there were reports across the country of people fainting during the film, or vomiting during that particular scene. Quite simply, *Alien* surprised the hell out of middle America (a middle America that wasn't really familiar with the work of David Cronenberg, who had been doing this kind of thing for years in movies such as *Shivers* and *Rabid*...).

For better or worse, *Alien* brought believable, graphic gore into the mainstream, blockbuster package.

If ever given the opportunity, interview someone who saw *Alien* in the theater in 1979. Inevitably, that viewer will tell you it was the most terrifying film he or she had seen up to that point. Forget *Jaws*; forget *The Exorcist*. Today, there have been three sequels to Ridley Scott's film, John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), and a million other movies that have raised the bar for gore in cinema, but in its day, *Alien*'s impact was unparalleled.

Here's how it worked: Audiences were drawn in by the film's sense of realistic "workaday" space travel, and completely unprepared for the chest-burster sequence. It so unnerved viewers that they were left rudderless, not knowing what to expect next. And, *Alien* didn't offer help either. The monster kept changing shape (growing into a full-fledged, basketball-star sized demon). And nothing could kill it. This sounds like an extremely simple set-up today, but nothing even approaching *Alien*'s scale, scope or skill had been attempted before it. The alien "costume" also had the distinction of being the most convincing such design yet put to film. Even when the audience got a look at the beast in all its glory, the monster was still scary. That had almost never been true before ... certainly not in the case of *It!* *The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) or *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1955).

Alien is like a master's thesis in how to make a great horror film. It opens with a pan across deep space (a planet specifically), and a very low-key musical score (from the inimitable Jerry Goldsmith). Underneath the music there's a howl of sorts ... kind of the cry of a space wind or something. But the moment is understated and there is an anticipatory feeling to it.

From there, Scott's camera gracefully prowls the long interior corridors of the *Nostromo* (and in many spots, the camera is actually moving from set to set; there are very few cuts). This tour of the ship presents the audience with the idea that they are actually aboard a ship, not just on a "movie set." It all seems terribly real, especially when the computers start talking to each other in isolation, deciding apparently that man is expendable.

And where is man? He's asleep, while machines tend to the running of the ship, and decide to wake him up. This opening sequence, which lasts just a few minutes, goes a long way towards establishing the reality of *Alien*'s universe. The ship looks real, we've seen desolate space outside (and heard the space winds...), and suddenly we're introduced to the technology that keeps the crew alive.

After introducing a smoking, coffee drinking, wholly belligerent crew (who many critics have compared to truck drivers), the film further establishes its universe's reality by undergoing a long, highly technical procedure: the Nostromo's landing on LV-426. Again, this is a kind of unglamorous approach to space travel, and Scott's camera catches several computers calculating reams of indecipherable, but no doubt important, information. These glimpses of technology, plus the workaday approach of the crew, remind audiences this is a technical procedure—a job—not an opportunity for glorious space adventure. Captain Kirk wouldn't be at home here.

Most films consider themselves lucky if they successfully create one "universe." Yet this movie is impressive because, following the landing, *Alien* begins to probe at the parameters of a universe outside the "space truckers" one already so well established. Lambert, Kane, and Dallas find an alien derelict, and thanks to some great set design and art direction (courtesy of H.R. Giger), it is immediately obvious that this is a vessel built for an organism of quite a different scale than man.

There are few commonalities in architecture: no doors as such; no hard angles; no symmetry; no control panels and instrumentation, and no windows. There's only a rudimentary, inexact sense of decks or levels, and in its difference from what we would expect to see, this derelict ship is a masterpiece of design. The greatest beauty of it is that it goes unexplained. Who were the people who populated this ship? Where did they come from? Why are they transporting alien eggs? What kind of world did they come from? How long ago did they crash? The alien derelict (and the incredible space jockey—which seems to be hewn from elephant bones...) suggests a tantalizing Lovecraftian notion: an ancient intelligence that's been

quiet since the beginning of time. The aliens who flew that ship may no longer exist in the universe at all, but by a cosmic coincidence, man intersects with them ... for an exercise in terror.

Amazingly, *Alien* creates two distinct worlds in its first half-hour: the Nostromo, the company and its hard-edges and computers, and the mysterious alien ship left for dead on the surface of an inhospitable world.

To top itself, *Alien* then creates the third and most interesting facet of its tale: an alien of different origin than either man or the crew of the derelict. The eggs aren't too scary or revolutionary in design; we've all seen eggs, after all. But the face-huggers, gruesome snake/crab/bat hybrids, are truly disturbing creations. From there, the creature explodes out of human bodies with the "chest-burster" phase, and then grows into the giant, biomechanoid drone. Terrifyingly, this alien has a mouth within a mouth within a mouth, and each aperture is coated with the sharpest metal teeth you've ever seen.

Again, *Alien* is brilliantly realized because, without explaining anything, the film makes the alien's life cycle comprehensible to a mainstream audience. We follow right along with the story—and buy into every detail of it—because each and every detail, from the shape of the Nostromo to the texture of the planet's surface, has felt right. It's a stunning, classic film because it gets so many things right.

There are so many sequences and ideas to admire in Ridley Scott's *Alien*. It pays homage to *Psycho* by killing off its main character (Captain Dallas) mid-way through the proceedings, and by naming its not-quite-right computer "Mother." It treats its characters realistically but respectfully: as scared, petty people who simply don't conduct diplomacy with alien life forms every day. The people of the Nostromo repeatedly misunderstand and underestimate their opponent because the alien is ... alien. One definition of the word alien is "different," and for once it is nice that a movie recognizes that another life form's motivations, desires, and biological imperatives might be completely separate from our own.

There's also a strong sexual subtext in *Alien*. Kane is an effeminate

man who is seen wearing a girdle (?) at one point, and who ends up as a receptacle for the *Alien* “baby.” Kane is essentially raped by the alien (in face-hugger mode), when it jams a reproductive “tube” down his throat to lay eggs. It’s difficult not to view this act as a twisted metaphor for oral copulation. If Kane represents promiscuity and danger (he gives birth to the alien...), the stony Ashe represents repression. He is a robot, and when he malfunctions, semen-like fluid leaks from his head, splashes everywhere, and mars all the surviving cast members. Predictably, the precipitating factor for this torrent, this ejaculation of fluid, is a confrontation with the beautiful and powerful Ripley in which he has been made to feel impotent before her superior authority.

Then, of course, there’s the famous “rape” of Lambert. In a truly strange (and never explained sequence), the alien’s phallic-shaped tail worms its ways between Lambert’s legs, and the film’s soundtrack is then dominated by breathy huffing and puffing and passionate-sounding panting. Fortunately, the viewer never sees what actually becomes of Lambert, but the inference of the rape scene is horrible enough.

On a side note regarding the issue of sex, and sex roles in *Alien*, Sigourney Weaver is a standout in a role that was originally written for a man. As the resourceful Ripley, she is perhaps the horror cinema’s first “modern” heroine. Her womanhood is not a weakness or a cross to bear, it is part of her identity as a human being. “Womanhood” doesn’t prevent her from taking command, leading others, or vanquishing the dragon. She’s tough, and smarter than any male crewmember. When Sigourney Weaver reprised the role in the 1986 sequel, she was nominated for an Academy Award, quite a feat for a reprise of a horror movie role, and some well-deserved recognition for the actress who has come to be associated with this franchise.

Alien is an incredibly effective—and important—horror film of the 1970s. It exploits the isolation of a crew alone in space, and lands several diverse life forms in confrontation in close-quarters. Humans, an alien, a cat, and a robot struggle for superiority in a conflict where the battle lines are not always clear. In this case, the soft “cuddlies” (human and feline) beat out the organisms of

“structural perfection and hostility” (xenomorph and robot) but *Alien* is such an effective horror film that the audience is unsure about the real outcome of the battle, even after the end credits have rolled. Is there another alien aboard the Narcissus shuttle? Is Jones infected?

Alien is so scary that it makes paranoids out of all of us. Often when we gaze up at the stars we see our best selves and a universe of possibilities. After watching *Alien*, we can only look at the stars and shiver. It warns us that when we finally grasp for the stars ... something may grasp back.

LEGACY: *Alien* launched the Hollywood career of director Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner* [1982], *Legend* [1985], *Thelma and Louise* [1991], *Gladiator* [2000]) as well as that of its star, the beautiful Sigourney Weaver (*Ghostbusters* [1984], *Working Girl* [1987], *Gorillas in the Mist* [1990], *Galaxy Quest* [1999]). In updating *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) with graphic special effects and weird, revolutionary set design, *Alien* also launched a full-bodied resurrection of the “monster in space” category of films. *Horror Planet* (1981), *Galaxy of Terror* (1981), *Predator* (1987), *Predator 2* (1991), and the recent *Pitch Black* (2000) all owe a debt to *Alien*’s artful (and financially successful) update of an old Hollywood formula. The franchise has itself lived long and prospered, spanning three decades: *Aliens* (1986), *Alien3* (1992), and *Alien Resurrection* (1997). As of this writing, there is perpetual talk of a fifth entry...

The infamous chest-bursting scene in *Alien*, which opened up the doors to increased gore in American horror films, was parodied to uproarious effect in Mel Brooks’ *Star Wars* pastiche *Spaceballs* (1987).

The Amityville Horror (1979) * * * ½

Critical Reception

“...the picture’s subtext is one of economic unease, and this is a theme that director Stuart Rosenerg plays on constantly.... Here is a horror movie for every woman who ever wept over a plugged-up

toilet ... for every man who ever did a slow burn when the weight of the snow caused his gutters to give way.... As horror goes, *Amityville* is pretty pedestrian. So's beer, but you can get drunk on it.... *The Amityville Horror*, beneath its ghost-story exterior, is really a financial demolition derby.”—Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, Berkley Books, 1981, page 142–144.

“The movie inflates gullibility into horror with cheap tricks.... Given the random quality of the Lutzes’ “evidence,” the horror has no dramatic focus; it is not concentrated in a shark or a possessed little girl. It can be flies in a room, or a car going out of control miles away. We don’t know what it is or where it is, and all it seems to want is fifteen hundred dollars, which disappears. Randomness can be frightening, though, and the movie could have made more of it....”—Veronica Geng, *New Yorker*, August 13, 1979, pages 97–98.

“...a horrible sense of déjà-vu as the movie churns out numerous post-*Exorcist* clichés. Tautly directed, but the thin material, and a dreadfully hammy priest from Steiger, effectively wreck what little suspense remains.”—Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*, Seventh Edition, Penguin Books, 1999, page 26.

“...a few decent scares, but mostly shameless false alarms.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, page 8.

Cast & Crew

CAST: James Brolin (George Lutz); Margot Kidder (Kathleen Lutz); Rod Steiger (Father Delaney); Murray Hamilton (Father Ryan); Don Stroud (Father Richard Bolen); Michael Sacks (Jeff); Val Avery (Sgt. Gionfriddo); Helen Shaver (Carolyn);

Irene Dailey (Aunt Helena); Amy Wright (Jackie); Marc Vahanian (Jimmy); Natasha Ryan (Amy); K.C. Martel (Greg); Meeno Peluce (Matt); John Larch (Father Nuncio); Elsa Raven (Miss Townsend); Ellen Saland (Bride); Eddie Barth (Agucci); Hank Garrett (Bartender); James Tolkan (Coroner); Carmine Foresta (Cop in House); Peter Maloney (Newspaper Reporter); Charlie Welch (Carpenter); J.R. Miller (Boy); Patty Burt (Girl); Michael Hawkins (NY State Trooper); Richard Hughes (2nd NY State Trooper); Jim Dukas (Neighbor); Baxter Harris (Cop #2 in House); Michael Stearns (Policeman); Jack Krupnick (Dead Father).

CREW: Samuel Z. Arkoff Presents *The Amityville Horror*. *Executive in Charge of Production:* Jere Henshaw. *Executive Producer:* Samuel Z. Arkoff. *Music by:* Lalo Schiffrin. *Editor:* Robert Brown, Jr. *Art Director:* Kim Swadows. *Director of Photography:* Fred J. Koenkamp. *Screenplay:* Sandor Stern. *Based on the Book by:* Jay Anson. *Producers:* Ronald Saland, Elliott Geisinger. *Directed by:* Stuart Rosenberg. *Unit Production Manager:* Russ Saunders. *First Assistant Director:* Ed Vaughan. *Casting:* Mike Fenton, Jane Feinberg, Judy Taylor. *Camera Operator:* Michael Benson. *Make-up:* Steve Abrums. *Hairstylist:* Christine Lee. *Property Master:* Donald Nunley. *Special Effects:* Dunley Rheaume. *Stunts:* Roger Creed. *Music Editor:* Ken Hall. *Visual Effects:* William Cruse. *Titles:* Pacific Title. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 118 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: On November 13, 1974, a deranged teenager murders his siblings and parents as they slumber peacefully in their beautiful Dutch Colonial in the quaint little town of Amityville, Long Island. The police, led by Sgt. Gionfriddo, arrive for clean-up and witness the aftermath of the dramatic massacre, seemingly caused by “voices” the shooter heard in his head, ordering him to kill those he loved.

Scarcely a year later, the house where the murders occurred is for sale, but most prospective buyers do not desire to live at a home where so gruesome a crime occurred. However, newly married couple Kathleen and George Lutz, with her three children from a previous marriage, are not in the position to be choosy. They have little money to spare and the house is priced low for a home of its size. The Lutz family decides to go for it and soon the house in Amityville is theirs.

Almost immediately upon their arrival, the house reacts to the family's presence. There is an unearthly chill emanating from somewhere within the basement, and the family priest, Father Delaney, becomes violently ill when he gives the home his blessing. Worse, a malevolent voice warns the kindly priest to "GET OUT," and a swarm of insects swirl about him. Kathleen's daughter, Amy, then befriends an "imaginary" creature called Jody who wants to play with her "forever," and even locks an unkind babysitter in a dark closet.

Most deeply affected, however, is George Lutz. Suddenly, he can no longer get warm, and undergoes a startling physical transformation: becoming gaunt and sick-appearing. Incident upon troubling incident piles as the days pass: \$1,500 dollars disappears inexplicably hours before an important family wedding; a nun becomes violently ill upon entering the home; windows seem to open of their own volition; and George's business hovers dangerously near bankruptcy.

Soon after the 12th day of home ownership, a worried George visits the local library to conduct research on the history of his home. To his shock, he finds that the house was built by a witch named John Ketchum, who was run out of Salem during the famous witch trials. Worse, the house seems to be built on "special ground" that is especially efficacious for the pursuit of Devil worship. As if this news is not bad enough, George also learns that a tribe of Indians once employed the land around the Amityville house as an "exposure bed," a cursed location where insane people were left to die in the cold.

At the urging of his business partner's psychically "sensitive" wife, George begins digging in the basement for the answer to the

Amityville riddle. What he finds hidden buried behind a wall of brick is astonishing and terrifying: a ghoulish “red” room that just might be the portal to Hell itself. Desperate to save their family (and investment), the Lutzes strike back at the evil in their house by reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Meanwhile, Father Delaney attempts to warn the Lutzes of the evil they face, but is dealt catastrophic reverses. He suffers a near fatal stroke, is wounded in a car accident, and eventually goes blind. All of this, he fears, is some kind of malicious attempt to keep him from rescuing the Lutzes from their new home.

On the 19th day since moving in, all hell breaks loose at the Amityville house. Constantly freezing, and facing mounting bills, George fears that he is “coming apart.” For her part, Kathleen is shocked that her kind and gentle new husband has mysteriously taken on the exact physical characteristics of the crazed boy who killed his family in their home a year earlier. As the walls run red with blood, black goop overflows in the basement, and devilish eyes glare at the tortured family from just outside the structure’s creepy-looking windows, the Lutzes decide to call it quits.

In the midst of a terrifying thunderstorm, the parents gather the children and their dog and flee, never to return to the home in Amityville.

COMMENTARY: Stephen King is a smart fellow with an unparalleled understanding of horror, and has devised a brilliant thesis about *The Amityville Horror*. While noting that the film is clumsily and cheaply made, the King of Terror also explains (in his book, *Danse Macabre*) that the film has a highly effective subtext, one that makes it immediate and scary. Simply, *The Amityville Horror* is about a money pit. That “giant sucking sound” you hear is not the cry of a ghost, but the sound of your cash being swept away in a bevy of phone bills, heating bills, repair bills, and so forth. Thus the film works for audiences on an important level. Fear of financial ruin after buying a house is a common and highly visceral American one, and *The Amityville Horror* knowingly, or perhaps unknowingly, exploits it.

Similarly, this author’s father always says that people “vote” their

wallets. If the economy is good, the incumbent president stays in office. If there's a recession, in comes a new president. Much the same thing can be said about horror films. When they concern immediate problems (such as financial security), we relate to them because we are all afraid of losing money...and hence our very security in a capitalist society. It's the economy, stupid!

So, look at *The Amityville Horror* from a purely financial angle. It's about a lemon of a house, a money pit that spirals out of control, costing the Lutzes more and more money. "There's nothing on the market like this—not at this price," someone notes of the home early in the film, a cue to the Lutzes that the deal is too good to be true.

Before long, finances are brought up again, when the Lutzes fear they "can't afford the house." Once they move in, that fear becomes a reality, and the dialogue reflects that chilling truth. "The IRS is calling," "You haven't been in to sign the payroll checks," "Bills have to be paid," "They'll nickel and dime you to death," and so on. The dialogue is obsessed with money, and the fact that the Lutzes don't have any to spare. Horror mounts, and so do their creditors.

At one point, a terrible chill blows in from the basement. It might be the chill of the Devil, or if one subscribes to the financial reading of the film, it's the cold hard chill of expenses: the basement needs to be insulated, pure and simple. Likewise, George's obsession with cutting firewood plays to the same basic economic fear: the family can't afford to keep the house heated. It's your personal finances, stupid!

In fact, every manifestation of evil in *The Amityville Horror* somehow spells out dollar signs for this financially strapped family. George worries when a window is left open (because the portal is letting EXPENSIVE heat out!). Black goop bubbles out of the house's plumbing, causing Mr. Lutz to hear more cash registers ringing inside his increasingly demented head. Then 1,500 dollars inexplicably disappears from the house. Then his business starts to fail. Then the house's very structure is compromised when a strange chamber is found in the basement. Finally, the financial burden of the house comes to be too much, and the "investment" in the house is no longer worth the stack of bills, creditors, and debts. The

Lutzes, facing an apocalypse of economics and credit ratings, flee forever...

Is that what really happened at the house in Amityville? This film is supposed to be based on a true story (and Jay Anson's trashy bestseller...), so who knows? But economic ruin and its inherent stress are certainly more plausible explanations for the Lutzes' sudden departure than a haunting in the middle of upscale Long Island. If anything, the film works against the Lutzes' story of a haunting because it reveals, in detail, how circumstances may have cascaded out of control, how the Lutzes felt victimized by bad luck, and consequently how they had to make up the haunting story to cover themselves. Did the family merely become hysterical in a storm one night, and use the cover of lightning and thunder to claim Chapter 11? Is that what drove them to flee their house and tell of a "haunting"?

Again, we don't know, but part of the movie's effectiveness is that it tells two totally different (and contradictory) stories at the same time. On the surface, the film highlights the travails of a family tortured by malevolent spirits. The subtext, however, concerns how the house bled the family of its most precious resource, money, and led them to ruin. Audiences tend to identify with the Lutz family not because they were "attacked" by evil, but because we've all had to pay the bills, and know how it feels to be swamped by debt, home repairs, and the like.

The Amityville Horror is an odd case because it is a completely effective horror movie. From its sing-songy theme song (which will get under your skin instantly), to the moment when the imaginary friend Jody proves not to be so imaginary, the film works on a basic, gut level. It is an incredibly scary film, but also a clumsy one. The priest subplot (with the scenery chewing Rod Steiger...) is waaay over the top, and the cop subplot is lifted right out of *The Exorcist*. Even the "manifestations" are scattershot in some regards. Are teeming flies really scary? Or people suddenly vomiting? Or a drunk who shows up at your screen door without warning? Not really, but somehow, in total, they form a crucible of terror, and—almost inexplicably—*The Amityville Horror* works. The director just keeps throwing things at his audience (blood on the wall, goopy

toilets, exploding front doors, night terrors, shot gun murders, et cetera) until the senses are raw. It's a hit or miss, nonsensical approach, but horror is chemistry as much as design, and this film has the right stuff. It claims to be based on a true story, but what it is really based on is the icy fear that there's not enough cash in your wallet to pay for the next home improvement...

LEGACY: To the shock and dismay of mainstream critics, *The Amityville Horror* racked up a fortune at the box office, proving again that the 1970s was truly the great decade of the horror film. The film made enough money to generate two theatrical sequels (*Amityville: The Possession* [1982], and *Amityville 3 in 3D* [1983]), as well as a cottage industry of low-budget, direct-to-video productions including: *Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes* (1989), *The Amityville Curse* (1990), *Amityville '92: It's About Time* (1992), and *Amityville: A New Generation* (1993).

The Brood

Cast & Crew

CAST: Oliver Reed (Dr. Hal Raglan); Samantha Eggar (Nola Carveth); Art Hindle (Frank Carveth); Cindy Hinds (Candice Carveth); Nuala Fitzgerald (Julianna); Henry Beckerman (Barton Kelly); Susan Hogan (Ruth); Nicholas Campbell (Chris).

CREW: *Written and directed by:* David Cronenberg. *Produced by:* Claude Heroux. *Cinematography:* Mark Iwrin. *Music by:* Howard Shore. *Film Editor:* Alan Collins. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 91 minutes.

DETAILS: David Cronenberg's final film of the 1970s leaves behind some of the explicit sexual themes of *Shivers* (1975) and its inferior retread *Rabid* (1976) to focus squarely on fascinating psychological notions and ideas of family. In common with his previous seventies films, *The Brood* is set at the isolated institute of a mad scientist (a "Psychoplastic" institute this time), but here mental problems actually "materialize" as physical creations (an idea Freud would

appreciate, no doubt). One patient (Nora) of Dr. Raglan's (Reed) channels her rage into the creation of a "brood": a murderous pack of children who (perhaps subconsciously, perhaps unconsciously...) exercise her murderous will. Nora's ex-husband (Hindle), seeking to discredit Raglan's work, runs afoul of these murderous creations, and learns—in gory detail—how Nora gives birth to them. A disturbing and scary movie that any Cronenberg fan will find essential viewing. *The Brood* was the critical and box office success that launched Cronenberg into the '80s and such films as *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986).

The Clonus Horror

Cast & Crew

CAST: Timothy Donnelly (Richard); Dick Sargent (Dr. Jameson); Keenan Wynn (Jake Noble); Peter Graves (Jeff Knight); Frank Ashmore (George); Paulette Breen (Lena); Eileen Dietz (Dana); David Hooks (Richard Knight).

CREW: *Directed by:* Robert S. Fiveson. *Screenplay by:* Ron Smith, Bob Sullivan. *Based on a Story by:* Bob Sullivan. *Screenplay Adapted by:* Myrl A. Schreibman, Robert S. Fiveson. *Produced by:* Myrl A. Schreibman. *Director of Photography:* Max Beaufort. *Film Editor:* Robert Gordon. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approximate).

DETAILS: A top-secret government cloning farm (run by *Bewitched*'s Dick Sargent), is breeding a new American underclass: innocents who exist to be harvested as body parts for the rich and powerful. In the know about this conspiracy is presidential candidate Jeff Knight (Graves), but his plans could be spoiled by a runaway clone (Donnelly) seeking the truth about his sheltered existence. A compelling low-budget film that despite lapses in taste and style has the sweet odor of paranoia all over it.

Dawn of the Dead (1979) * * * *

“*Dawn of the Dead* is one of the best horror films ever made—and, as an inescapable result one of the most horrifying. It is gruesome, sickening, disgusting, violent, brutal and appalling. It is also ... brilliantly crafted, funny, droll and savagely merciless in its satiric view of the American consumer society. Nobody ever said art had to be in good taste.”—Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Home Movie Companion* (1993 Edition), Andrews and McMeel, 1993, page 152.

“It is quite possible that *Dawn* is the bloodiest and goriest motion picture in history.... However, it happens to be marvelously directed, very well-photographed, and competently acted.... He [Romero] is a terrific action coordinator, and panic and social breakdowns are prominent in most of his efforts ... a top-notch horror film....”—Tom Rogers, *Films in Review*, Volume XXX, Number 5, May 1979.

“*Dawn of the Dead* could not be the horror landmark that *Night of the Living Dead* was, so Romero opted for the next best thing: he made a better film. The sequel escalates the gore, the humor, and the body count to new levels of unreality.... The message about violence in the film is: When violence exists for its own sake, its perpetrator has lost a fundamental quality that will ensure his survival. We are allowed to enjoy the violence only when it is an aspect of defense.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crowne Publishers, 1983, page 47.

“As one of the handful of people who saw this film before seeing *Night of the Living Dead*, this viewer was completely unprepared for the experience. For all of its gory splendor, Romero's greatest feat here is dissecting modern society, showing all of our

cultural constructs (i.e. government, family, the media, religion, and science) failing miserably when faced with a threat from within. This film should be included in any time capsule of the latter half of the 20th century to demonstrate the zeitgeist of an age. Almost a response to the Apollo 13 mission: Houston, we don't have a solution!"—
Bill Latham, *Mary's Monster*, Powys Books.

Cast & Crew

CAST: David Emge (Steven Andrew); Ken Foree (Peter); Scott H. Reiniger (Roger); Gaylen Ross (Fran); David Crawford (Dr. Foster); David Early (Mr. Berman); Richard France (Scientist); Howard Smith (TV Commentator); Daniel Dietrich (Givens); Fred Baker (Commander); Jim Baffico (Wooley); Rod Stouffer (Young Officer on Roof); Jese Del Gre (Old Priest); Clayton McKennon, John Rice (Officers in Project Apartments); Ted Bank, Randy Kovitz, Patrick McCloskey, Joe Pilato (Officers on Police Dock); Pasquale Buba, Tom Savini, Tony Buba, Marty Schiff, Joe Shelby, Dave Hawkins, Taso Stavrakos, Tom Kapusta, Nick Tallo, Rudi Ricci, Larry Vaira (Motorcycle Raiders); Sharon Cecacatti, Pam Chatfield, Mike Christopher, Clayton Hill, Jay Stover (Lead Zombies).

CREW: Herbert R. Steinmann and Billy Baxter Present a Laurel Group Presentation in Association with Claudio Argento and Alfred Cuomo, George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. *Sound:* Tony Buba. *Lighting:* Carla Augenstein. *Assistant Camera:* Tom Dubensky. *Editor:* George A. Romero. *Screenplay Consultant:* Dario Argento. *Assistant Editor:* Kenneth Davidow. *Make-up and Cosmetic Special Effects:* Tom Savini. *Assistant Director:* Christine Forrest. *Make-up Assistants:* Nancy Allen and Jeannie Jefferies. *Costumes:* Josie Caruso. *Sets:* Production Coordinators. *Set Decorations:* Josie Caruso, Barbara

Lifsher. *Wardrobe*: Michele Martin. *Graphics*: Joseph Eberle. *Explosive Effects*: Gary Zeller, Don Barry. *Weapons Coordinator*: Clayton Hill. *Weapons*: the Plastics Factory. *Original Soundtrack*: the Goblins with Dario Argento. *Continuity*: John Rice. *Casting*: John Amplas. *Casting Assistants*: Ellen Hopkins, Michael Lies. *Unit Manager*: Jay Stover. *Production Manager*: Zilla Clinton. *Assistant Producer*: Donna Siegal. *Director of Photography*: Michael Gornick. *Produced by*: Richard P. Rubinstein. *Written and Directed by*: George A. Romero. *Distribution Consultant*: Ben Barenholtz. *Production Assistants*: Leslie Augenstein, Sharon Caccatti, Margarido Delgado, Ed Letteri, Dan Lupovitz, Diane Westerman. *Truck Stunt Drivers*: Leonard DeStefans, John Konter, Carl Scott. *Helicopter Services*: Royale Helicopter Inc. *Helicopter Services*: Barth Bartholomae. *Graphics*: Joseph Eberle. *Jim Borgen*: Mall Security. *Script Consultant*: Dario Argento. *Equipment*: F & B Ceco, New York. *Sound Transfers*: Aquarius Sound. *Production Services*: The Latent Image Inc., The Ultimate Mirror Ltd., Laurel Tape and Film Inc. *Costumes*: Brooks Van Horn, Maiers Pittsburgh. *Hairstyles*: Hairtique. *Optical Effects*: Exceptional Optical. *Consultant*: Arthur J. Canistro. A Laurel Group Production. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: None (Unrated). *Running Time*: 122 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Mankind's worst nightmare escalates rapidly. The bodies of the dead are "walking" and devouring the living. When people die during this strange plague, they become zombies themselves, and the only way to kill these hungry ghouls is a shot or blow to the head. In response to this disaster of massive proportions, martial law has been declared in the United States. Despite the president's package of "new initiatives" aimed at stopping the zombie plague, society is breaking down. This fact is nowhere more evident than at a Pittsburgh news station where various factions bicker about what to do, and an unscrupulous producer posts a list of superimposed "rescue stations" over his program ... despite the fact that most stations are inoperative.



Attention Kmart shoppers: Zombies are on the loose in *Dawn of the Dead* (1979).

One production assistant, Fran, objects to this procedure. With her lover Steven, the station's traffic reporter, she plans to flee the city in a stolen helicopter.

Nearby, a SWAT team has a bloody showdown at a tenement building with locals who refuse to turn over the bodies of the dead for appropriate disposal. The situation turns bloody when shots are exchanged and zombies attack. Two officers, a lean black man named Peter, and a sardonic blond white man, Roger, strike up a friendship and talk about fleeing the city. Before they can escape the pandemonium however, they learn that the denizens of the building have been hoarding their dead in the basement. There, Roger and Peter confront a room of flesh-eating zombies and strengthen their resolve to get out while there is still a chance for survival.

Roger, Peter, Fran and Steve meet at the helicopter near midnight and flee the city. They fly high above rural Pennsylvania and watch as a redneck hunting party blows away approaching zombies. Later, the helicopter lands for refueling at a small rural airport and the

four fugitives face several encounters with rampaging ghouls. They start to lose hope, but the next day run across a large indoor mall that offers the possibility of sanctuary.

Steven lands the helicopter on the roof of the mall and the foursome check things out. They break inside the establishment and find themselves in a second level storeroom. They barricade themselves inside and let an exhausted Steven sleep while Peter and Roger dine on Spam.

Thinking the shopping mall could be a gold mine, Roger and Peter plan a hit-and-run mission in search of supplies. They reactivate the mall's power and steal the key ring granting them access to some 130 stores. They go shopping even though zombies dot the food courts and escalators of the mall. Hearing the ruckus below, Steven decides to join the other men, even though he is not exactly a crack shot.

In a department store, Peter and Roger forage for such goods as a TV and radio, and then join up with Steven, who has had another close call with the zombies roaming the mall.

Back up in the storeroom, a zombie pushes open the door and nearly kills Fran, but she is rescued when the men return. Later, Steven reveals to Roger and Peter that Fran is pregnant.

Fran soon expresses her desire to leave the mall and learn to fly the helicopter, should anything happen to Steven. Her advice is ignored as the three men become obsessed with the notion of making the mall their stronghold. This dangerous plan involves moving trucks to barricade the front and rear entrances of the mall, and clearing up all the zombies inside the large facility. Roger starts to get cocky while driving one of the trucks and his attitude costs him dearly when a zombie chomps down on his leg, injuring him badly.

Despite Roger's injury, the foursome survive the clean-up procedure and find themselves in possession of the mall: a land of luxury complete with grocery stores, gun shops, a video arcade, a bank, an ice skating rink, a barber shop and other amenities of the dying human civilization.

Before long, Roger gets sick, a victim of the strange infection brought on by the zombie bite. He informs Peter that he will try not to come back as a zombie, but it is a useless gesture. Soon after Roger dies, he is resurrected as a ghoul and Peter shoots him in the head. Meanwhile, Steven asks Fran to marry him, but she has grave concerns about such a commitment under these circumstances. Making matters worse, there have been no further transmissions on the TV or by radio, and the human race really seems to be on the verge of extinction.

A gang of motorcycle raiders invade the mall, and Peter, Steven and Fran defend their territory. A war for possession of the shopping arena breaks out and before long, hundreds of zombies are back inside, and all over the grounds. Believing the mall to be “his” possession Steven opens fire on the thugs, but they eventually shoot back, injuring him just enough to make him fodder for the zombies. Trapped in an elevator, Steven is mauled by the undead, and promptly returns to “life” as a smart zombie. Even as a ghoul, he retains some sense of memory. He recalls where Fran and Peter live, and leads the zombies up to the apartment on the second floor. Fran and Peter flee the mall, even as the motorcycle raiders are devoured by zombies, and make a quick escape by helicopter.

And the zombie plague continues.

COMMENTARY: When there’s no more room in the Hell, the dead will populate our cineplexes ... or something like that.

Dawn of the Dead is a 1970s miracle. It’s a low-budget horror masterpiece that has the audacity to tell audiences something meaningful about American life in the 1970s at the same time it scares the hell out of them. It is wickedly funny, thoroughly disgusting, and if honesty permits, a little overlong. But whatever minor flaws it bears, *Dawn of the Dead* is George Romero’s masterpiece: a near-perfect fusion of horror, artistic film editing, and social commentary.

In 1968, George Romero gave the world *Night of the Living Dead*, the ultimate Vietnam era horror film. In the seventies, Romero struck again with much less popular, but equally stimulating, genre ventures about feminism (*Jack’s Wife* [1971]), and martial law (*The*

Crazies). He even successfully demythologized vampires in 1976's *Martin*. But, not unpredictably, none of those heady horror ventures had the raw drawing power of *Night of the Living Dead*—a gorefest with spark to accompany its scares, and intellect to match its gore. So *Dawn of the Dead* was probably inevitable, and we can all be glad Romero decided to return to the *Living Dead* saga after a decade, because his sequel, in many ways, is superior to the original that changed the world.

But *Dawn of the Dead* is not for the faint of heart. It starts with pandemonium in a news studio as people run about, shouting angrily, like chickens with their heads cut off. From this anxiety-inducing “behind the scenes” look at society's collapse, the film dumps the audience into a cesspool of bloody violence as police brutally clash with the inhabitants of a tenement building. Heads explode, bodies are perforated, bullets fly ... and this is before the first zombie is introduced! This orgy of bloodshed was as far into the film as many major newspaper critics made it in 1979. Had they stayed, they might have learned some interesting things. Like the fact that the violence has artistic and dramatic purpose, and that Romero is a director worth watching. He never fails to offer interesting insight into the human condition, and *Dawn of the Dead* is no exception.

The movie reaches its full power once the four survivors have reached the shopping mall. They note with awe that zombies are clamoring around the place with interest, and one of the characters comments with straight face that the shopping arena was “an important place in their lives....” Verifying that remark, Romero's camera captures zombies pounding at storefronts in anticipation of devouring human flesh...or is it simply a great sale they're interested in? This is funny stuff, and we get a healthy laugh out of our materialistic, consumer culture. Aren't we funny, the way we long to possess things, the way we place artificial value on owning jewelry, fur coats or pricey electronics? But like, any clever commentator, Romero doesn't let his audience gain the morally superior position, or a sense of comfort.

Before long, it is not the zombies who are acting stupid—it's us, the humans.

For instance, Fran voices the opinion several times that it would be safer to take some supplies and leave the mall, but the men—*blinded by dollar signs*—want to stay and live in luxury. “There’s an awful lot of stuff down there we can use,” they note with a degree of avarice. Steve buys in completely to the materialism of the mall, and even though it is filled with zombies, enthuses “You should see all the great stuff we got, Fran!” The world is falling apart, and our heroes are going on a shopping spree!

The silliest part about the whole thing is that nothing, not the fur coats, not the jewelry, and not the pricey electronics, means *anything* any more. Money doesn’t mean anything. Society has collapsed, but these men try to re-inject meaning into the constructs of a society that is obsolete. Instead, they should be building a new society. But playing arcade games is more fun, isn’t it?

Not surprisingly, it doesn’t take very long for Steven’s passion to own “belongings” to escalate into dangerous obsession. When a gang of motorcyclists want the riches of the mall too, Steven and the others opt to stay and fight for what they feel is theirs. In essence they remain in danger to squabble over material “things” rather than seek safety elsewhere and avoid what becomes a catastrophic confrontation. Now the zombies don’t seem so foolish anymore, but human nature does.

While watching *Dawn of the Dead*, we suddenly realize our own complicity in the materialism of our country. When “good” middle-class people that we like (the four survivors) loot and rob and live high off the hog, it’s fun and even heroic ... a form of wish fulfillment. But when thugs who dress in leather and get drunk do the same thing we frown on them as interlopers. In the end, the battle for the mall costs everybody dearly, except for the zombies, who go on a feeding frenzy. If they had gambled on human nature, they would have won.

Romero’s satiric stabs at America’s consumer culture, and his comparison of zombies to K-mart shoppers, have made *Dawn of the Dead* the thinking-man’s action movie. Yet, much of the film’s quality comes in its quieter, less obvious moments.

It’s fun to watch how the storage room/ apartment goes from being

a spartan shell to a luxurious, expensively decorated apartment with all the best in furnishings and electronics that can be stolen. It's an interesting slice of post-apocalyptic life too. Finding prominent placement in this apartment of the future is a brand new TV set. Of course, there's nothing on TV since society has collapsed, but old habits die hard, don't they? In one ridiculous scene, the foursome, a makeshift family, even competes over who should control the TV, turning it off and on as though it still has some value at this late date. What's on the screen? Just static.

On a wider scale, *Dawn of the Dead* reveals a failed American infrastructure. The government is unable to stop the zombie plague despite new initiatives from the president. The media is equally bankrupt, sending survivors to defunct rescue centers in an attempt to boost ratings. The police are failures too, abandoning their posts and using their vehicles (whether by sea or by air) to seek escape. The bureaucratic infrastructure of the United States fails to address a crisis, and that's Romero's strongest point. An America attacked from within, in his eyes, would very soon lose its moral compass and descend into barbaric lawlessness. Those who survive are the ones who can cope with the changes. The ones who cling to TV sets and shopping malls are the ones who become extinct.

Despite all this social commentary, *Dawn of the Dead* is as light as a feather in many ways. It is fast-paced, gory and exciting. Romero alternates jokes and horror in adroit fashion, and the zombies are comedic one moment, a threat the next, and finally, rather pitiable. It's to Romero's credit as a filmmaker (and as an observer of humanity) that he is able to see all sides of these monsters in just one film. The zombies, simultaneously funny, sad and repugnant, never come off worse than the humans do. At least the zombies are acting by some strange urge. What force drives humans to kill each other? To keep each other hungry? To lock each other out in the cold? The zombies, at least, don't know greed.

If *Dawn of the Dead* has a significant weakness, it is that the last twenty minutes or so seem like a free-for-all, like Romero has lost control of his set (and his sensibilities). The motorcycle gang led by make-up genius Tom Savini is overtly cartoonish, and Romero stages the final battle as a slapstick comedy. The thugs throw cream

pies at the zombies, and ridiculous sight gags abound.

In one truly absurd moment, the zombies eat a human who has attached himself to one of those blood pressure kiosks you might see at Wal-Mart. They rip him apart, leaving only his severed arm still tethered to the machine. His blood pressure, not surprisingly, quickly drops to zero...

These potshots are fun and silly, all right, but they nearly wreck the suspense of the finale. Maybe it's just that Romero is having so much fun with the living dead, he can't stay disciplined. Still, that's a really minor problem with a tense, absorbing horror film, and one of the ten best of the 1970s.

The Day Time Ended (1979) * *

Cast & Crew

CAST: Jim Davis (Grant); Chris Mitchum (Richard); Dorothy Malone (Ann); Marcy Lafferty (Beth); Scott Kolden (Steve); Natasha Ryan (Jenny).

CREW: Compass International/Manson International Release and Charles Band Productions Present *The Day Time Ended*. *Cinematographer:* John Morrill. *Editor:* Ted Nicolaou. *Music Conducted by:* John Watson. *Music Produced by:* Don Perry. *Music Composed by:* Richard Band. *Screenplay:* Wayne Schmidt, J. Larry Carroll, David Schmoeller. *From an Original Story by:* Steve Neill. *Executive in Charge of Production:* David Wolf. *Executive Producer:* Charles Band. *Produced by:* Wayne Schmidt, Steve Neill. *Associate Producer:* Paul W. Gentry. *Directed by:* John "Bud" Cardos. *Production Supervisor:* Fredric Shore. *First Assistant Director:* Bob Shue. *Second Assistant Director:* Kathy Slakey, Debra Michaelson. *Production Coordinator:* Mary Church. *First Assistant Camera:* Ron Raschke. *Assistant Editors:* Rebecca Navert, Dick Ross. *Models Constructed by:* Greg Jein. *City of Light by:* Jim Danforth. *Gaffer:* Ronald Batzdorff. *Key Grip:* Eric Stoner. *Sound Mixer:* Joel Goldsmith. *Boom Man:* Dallas Clarke. *Art Director:* Rusty Rosene. *Assistant Art Director:* Don Lalingo. *Director of Special Visual Effects:* Paul W. Gentry. *Technical Advisor:* David Allen. *Effects Art Director:* Dave Carson. *Special Animated Effects Supervisor:* Peter Kuran. *Special Animation Crew:* Chris Casady, Rick Taylor, Jerome Seven, Garry Waller, Pam Vick, Lori Redfern. *Dimensional Animators:* Randy Cook, David Allen, Paul W. Gentry. *Stop-Motion Figures Designed and Created by:* Lyle Conway. *Stop Motion Armatures:* Tom St. Armand. *Special Pyrotechnic Effects:* Joe

Viskocil. *Storyboards*: Randy Cook. *Effects Editor*: Steve Neilson. *Models*: Lain Liska. *Script Supervisor*: Sandra Marley. *Costume Supervisor*: Val McDade. *Make-up*: Ve Neill. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 80 minutes.



Grant (Jim Davis) and his wife (Dorothy Malone) face a house of bizarre phenomena in *The Day Time Ended* (1979).

SYNOPSIS: The light from a trinary supernova reaches Earth after hundreds of years, and impacts the American southwest. Meanwhile, a family led by grandpa Grant arrives at its new home in the desert. Grant presents the grandchildren, Jenny and Steve, with horses. While playing with her new pony, little Jenny discovers a bizarre green pyramid behind the stable.

Inside, patriarch Grant's retirement home is a wreck, as if ransacked. When Jenny tries to show him the pyramid, it has vanished, but Jenny soon learns it has been shrunk to toy size.

That night, two UFOs buzz overhead. Then strange things start to happen in the house: a mirror repairs itself, a green light envelops various rooms, and a little emerald alien materializes in Jenny's bedroom, wanting to play with her. This tiny creature vanishes when a strange mechanical probe arrives outside the window to threaten it.

Outside, earthquake tremors rock the house and strange lights fly overhead again. The family is confronted by the flying mechanical probe. It hovers into the house and stops a bullet cold when Grant shoots at it. Jenny's little green pyramid stops the probe in its tracks as Richard, Grant's eldest son, returns home from a trip.

The probe disappears, only to be replaced by hostile alien monsters locked in a wrestling match. When these monstrosities attack the barn, Grant fights them with a pitchfork. But lights surround the house and stable, and night inexplicably becomes day.

Suddenly, Grant's house sits not in the American southwest, but in a junkyard of derelict spacecrafts and airplanes! Grant gets back inside the house with the family just as it skips time tracks again and ends up in a field of green pyramids. Little Jenny becomes trapped there as the house phases out of the time continuum. Beth, Jenny's mother, disappears in the vortex while trying to find her little girl.

When their house finally stops traveling through time, Grant, Grandma and Steve find themselves on a planet with three suns. Surprisingly, Beth meets them there. She says that Jenny is fine, and that Richard has arrived safely too. She then leads them to a mysterious life form of "warmth and joy" that has been protecting them all along. Together, the family makes for a beautiful, super-advanced metropolis in the distance...

COMMENTARY: If anybody can makes heads or tails out of the preceding synopsis (and the film *The Day Time Ended*) please send a letter of explanation to this author immediately (care of his kindly publisher).

Seriously, this is one botched movie. What it appears to be is a cheapjack hybrid of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and any

movie in which stop-motion creatures attack one another while (in separate shots) bad actors stare, square-jawed at the “incredible action” in mock amazement. Still, there are some pretty good special effects in evidence. The optical laser blasts and flying UFOs are especially impressive, as is the deadly mechanical probe that enters Grant’s house. Even the matte work is neat, and kind of evocative of the pulpy science fiction yarns of yesteryear. But the rubbery, stop-motion space monsters are another story. The dumbest moment in the film may just be when one of them politely knocks on the front door of Grant’s house...

If one isn’t put off by *The Day Time Ended*’s lack of a coherent plot, it is possible to sit back and enjoy the ridiculous, mock-profound dialogue offered up by the script. “I don’t know where in time I am...” voices one disembodied character, perfectly mimicking the confusion the audience will soon feel. But this author’s favorite line belongs to the film’s stolid patriarch. He advises his son, straight faced, to “see if you can jerk that battery cable off.” The script might have been smarter not to put the words “jerk” and “off” in the same sentence, but it’s just one more in a line of stupid moments.

Another great line belongs to Beth, who tells her little girl: “Don’t talk now!” Not “Be quiet!” or “Ssssh!” Just, “Don’t talk now!” Nice use of language.

Much like this review itself, *The Day Time Ended* appears to be missing a third act, as though a reel of the film got sucked away into the same vortex as Grant’s family. During one exciting action scene, the family is systematically separated throughout the endless currents of time, but then the group is suddenly all back together heading for a “living” city of “peace and joy,” before one can even moan at the pat resolution. It appears that a good twenty pages of script got eliminated between shots, an idea reinforced by the skimpy running time (barely 80 minutes). Anyway, it’s a totally absurd and nonsensical conclusion to an absurd and nonsensical film. When one of the characters states dreamily that “maybe this was all meant to be,” the viewer is tempted to shout back with anger, “Not bloody likely!”

***Dracula* (1979) * * ***

Critical Reception

“Langella is merely flip, one of the least impressive screen vampires.... And much of the film is simply a reshuffling of old lines and plot elements.... There are, however, some magnificent shots of castles and Cornwall, enough stunts for a series of vampire movies, plus a rousing Williams score and a pleasingly outrageous climactic sequence.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, pages 108–109.

“Badham trades on the hero’s predilection for the dark to provide a marvel of tenebrous melodrama, and he manages to skirt the ridiculous without pretending that it isn’t there.”—Susan Lardner, *New Yorker*, July 30, 1979, page 70.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Frank Langella (Count Dracula); Laurence Olivier (Abraham Van Helsing); Donald Pleasence (Jack Seward); Kate Nelligan (Lucy Seward); Trevor Eve (Jonathan Harker); Jan Francis (Mina Van Helsing); Janine Duvitski (Annie); Tony Haygarth (Renfield); Kristine Howarth (Mrs. Galloway); Peter Wallis (Priest); Sylvester McCoy (Walter); Teddy Turner, Joe Belzger, Ted Carroll, Frank Henson.

CREW: Universal Studios and the Mirisch Corporation Present *Dracula*, a Walter Mirisch/John Badham Production. *Music Composed by:* John Williams. *Executive Producer:* Marvin E. Mirisch. *Screenplay by:* W.D. Richter. *Based on the Play by:* Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston *and the Novel by:* Bram Stoker. *Producer:* Walter Mirisch. *Directed by:* John Badham. *Director of Photography:* Gilbert Taylor. *Production Designer:* Peter Murton.

Editor: John Bloom. *Costume Designer:* Julie Harris. *Special Visual Effects:* Albert Whitlock. *Associate Producer:* Tom Pevsner. *Production Manager:* Hugh Harlow. *Assistant Director:* Anthony Waye. *Second Unit Director:* Gerry Gavigan. *Art Director:* Brian Ackland Snow. *Set Dresser:* Peter Young. *Sound Editor:* Jonathan Bates. *Sound Mixer:* Robin Gregory. *Camera Operator:* Roy Ford. *Continuity:* Pamela Carlton. *Make-up:* Peter Robb-King. *Hair:* Colin Jamison. *Models:* Brian Smithies. *Special Effects:* Roy Arbogast. *Visual Consultant:* Maurice Binder. *Additional Photography:* Leslie Dear and Harry Oakes. *Music Orchestrated by:* Herbert Spencer *and Performed by:* the London Symphony Orchestra. *Property Master:* Andy Andres. *Casting:* Mary Welway. Filmed in Panavision, and Technicolor and recorded in Dolby. Made at Shepperton Studio Centre, Shepperton, England, Twickenham Studios, London, and on location in Cornwall. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 109 minutes.

P.O.V.

“I wanted the film to be done in black and white.... But while it’s not in black in white, I love the color that’s in it—because it’s very muted, soft, easy. It’s not garish colors. It’s not obviously Hammer horror color”⁴⁵.—Frank Langella discusses the look of *Dracula* (1979).

SYNOPSIS: In the early 1900s, a Romanian vessel bound for London is tossed by a storm at sea, and the crew runs about in desperation to unload the cargo they deem responsible for their ship’s misfortune: a crate belonging to one Count Dracula. Just as the captain is ready to dump the troublesome crate into the turbulent sea, a wolf breaks out of the container and kills the sailors in brutal fashion. The wolf is Dracula himself, the undead vampire from Transylvania.

Later, the doomed ship breaks up against a rocky English shore, and Dracula is the only survivor of the disaster. A beautiful young woman, Mina Van Helsing, is summoned to his side, and held in a hypnotic trance by this magnetic, charismatic stranger. Meanwhile, plans are made for Mina's friend Lucy Seward to marry young Jonathan Harker.

In the midst of this merriment, Mina inexplicably grows weaker ... anemic, and Count Dracula of Transylvania is introduced to London society as he purchases his home, a castle called Carfax Abbey. Dracula soon enslaves the odd Renfield as a servant, and continues draining Mina of her life-blood by night. Lucy Seward finds herself instantly drawn to Count Dracula, while Renfield attacks Jonathan Harker and is subsequently incarcerated in the sanitarium run by Lucy's father, Jack Seward.





A romantic Dracula (Frank Langella) emerges from the mist in John Badham's disco-inspired *Dracula* (1979).

Dracula requires more blood to maintain his undead life, and soon drains Mina to the very point of death. When Mina finally expires, her father, Abraham Van Helsing, travels from Holland to London to investigate her untimely death. He determines that the strange puncture marks on Mina's neck are evidence of a vampire attack, and warns the Seward family that a "Nosferatu" is among them. This seemingly impossible fact is proven when Mina rises from the grave

as a vampire and drinks the blood of a baby. Though tortured by the thought of killing his daughter, Van Helsing preserves Mina's immortal soul by driving a stake through her heart and killing the undead creature.

Soon, Lucy is totally beguiled by the romantic stranger, Dracula. Eloquent and sincere, the strange count finds his way into Lucy's heart, and when he comes to her in the night to drain her blood, she gives herself freely. Later, Von Helsing learns Dracula is the monster he seeks when the vampire fails to cast a reflection in a mirror, and reveals an intense dislike for garlic. While Seward, Von Helsing and Harker rally their forces against the foreign count, Dracula promises Lucy that she shall be his bride, above all other women. Pursued from Carfax Abbey by the vampire hunters, Dracula and Lucy flee London on a ship bound for Romania.

Boarding the ship *en route*, Von Helsing and Harker attempt to save Lucy from Dracula's grasp as the sun rises. They locate Dracula and Lucy in a coffin in the ship's hold, but the vampires strike first and Von Helsing is impaled on the very wooden stake he intended to destroy Dracula with. Dying, Von Helsing helps Harker destroy the count by hoisting the vampire out of the ship's hold into the blinding sunlight above.

Lucy watches in horror as her lover is destroyed in the light of day, and later she smiles when she spies a dark, caped figure flying away to safety on the horizon...

COMMENTARY: John Badham directed *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977 so it should come as little surprise that his 1979 version of *Dracula* is far more romantic, hip, and seductive than most previous re-tellings of Bram Stoker's tale. Eschewing the stony presence of Christopher Lee and the strange grace of Bela Lugosi, Frank Langella portrays the famous vampire as a romantic swinger (with an open-chested shirt...). Though the film represents a pretty radical reinterpretation of the vampire and the mythos, Badham is strong on generating a gothic atmosphere, and the love story's prominence makes the film strangely involving, even if it lacks the horror one might expect or have hoped for.

It's probably fair to state that Langella is no horror fan's favorite

Dracula, and that may be because he deliberately offers a human portrayal of the vampire. His “realistic” take on the Count of Transylvania results in a soft-spoken sexual animal instead of the repugnant, hard-as-nails warrior envisioned by Stoker. Accordingly, the film sometimes feels like a “lightweight” version of *Dracula*’s story, and Langella’s perfectly coiffed hair-do and Italian look sometimes evoke Tony Manero as much as they do Nosferatu. It’s hard to imagine this guy leading troops in battle, and impaling enemies on spikes.

Yet Langella’s unique portrayal shouldn’t be dismissed out of hand. In choosing to downplay Dracula’s ugliness and to accent his attractive qualities, Langella has permitted for the opening up of a more passionate love story than one has come to expect in a *Dracula* film. If each *Dracula* film must find its own niche, then Langella’s interpretation does that for Badham’s film. The film is a perfect reflection of the more innocent late 1970s, a backlash against the cynical early part of the decade. *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and now *Dracula* are all gee-whiz wonder stories, filled with heart and upbeat senses of adventure.

When Lucy and Dracula dance together, for instance, there is a close-up of the vampire’s hand gracefully taking hold (and control...) of Lucy’s. There is grace, fluidity and purpose to his movement as he twirls around with his human prize. The audience doesn’t turn away at this moment, fearful of Lucy’s fate. On the contrary, viewers long for Lucy to accept the vampire’s advances. For once, the viewer can actually believe that a woman would lust for Dracula, and Badham keeps highlighting that point, sometimes with slow zooms, sometimes by focusing squarely on their embraces or meaningful glances. And, with John Williams’ overly romantic, lush score dominating their encounters, Dracula’s love affair with Lucy feels important and “real” for perhaps the first time in film history.

That’s an accomplishment, because in most Hammer *Dracula* pictures, the women are always “mesmerized” by Dracula, but then horrified by him ... and rescued by their inevitably bland, white-bread fiancés or boyfriends. The so-called “relationship” between Dracula and his love always feels forced in those films, a result of

hypnotism and a plot which requires a damsel to be put in distress. By contrast, Langella is actually hypnotic, attractive, and sexual...a believable magnet for the inquisitive and intellectual Lucy.

As a long time fan of vampire films, this author also appreciates that Badham's film goes right to the heart of Jonathan Harker's dislike for Dracula. Without mincing words, the vampire "gets" to Lucy first (in the sexual sense) and Harker is disturbed that his virginal prize has experienced intimacy with another man before their marriage. His need to hunt Dracula has as much to do with revenge and male pride, perhaps, as it does with saving Lucy from a monster. This *Dracula* is thus a morality play about virtue. In it, a "proper" woman and an erotic/exotic foreigner have a sexual dalliance, and in the process flout Victorian convention. The passion between Lucy and Dracula is tangible ... but she should love her husband, not the dark stranger, at least according to the mores of her repressive society. Nowhere in film history do those undercurrents of Stoker's story find better expression (at least until Coppola's 1992 *Dracula*).

In telling his love story, Badham uses some interesting visuals to express Dracula's larger-than-life, romantic stature. At one point, the vampire appears out of a swirling fog like some powerful icon of darkness and mystery. During another crucial scene, strobing and pulsating blue laser light surrounds Dracula and his surrendering conquest. It's another expression of his power, a "strange" and unearthly light that covers them like a blanket. Unfortunately, these expressive film touches today reek of '70s, disco-era accouterments, and appear dated, even if they are an effective way of visually dramatizing Dracula's "otherworldly" power. At least Badham was buttressing his themes visually, and that bespeaks an understanding of film's inherent power.

As a monster, however, Langella is something of a bust. He doesn't exude terror, or much of anything beyond sexual danger. Mindful of this weakness in the central performance, Badham purposely handles the horror aspects of the film with a real expressionist flair. Mina's resurrection as a vampire is nothing short of terrifying. She returns as a monstrous, hungry figure, and is truly a sight to behold in her filthy dress, clutching a baby to feed on. Her return from the

grave is probably the scariest sequence in the film, and one guesses, again, that this is by intent.

Dracula is dangerous, powerful and romantic, but in this production he is not designed to be scary. That job is left for his minions. Even in the scenes when Dracula is carrying out murderous deeds, ostensibly frightening, it is important to note that Langella isn't really involved. Instead, in those instances, Dracula is portrayed as a wolf with slaving jaws, or a bat. The film thus splits its thrills. When Badham wants to evoke sexual danger, Langella is on screen. When he wants to evoke terror and horror, it's up to Dracula's surrogates to do the trick. Not a bad conceit.

Some might think the decision to accentuate Dracula as lover over devourer is a cop-out, but they should remember that this is a romantic interpretation of Stoker's work. And the finale reeks of romance too as Dracula flies away free, only to return to his smiling lover another day. For the first time onscreen then, Dracula is a truly sexy, larger-than-life hero, and, it seems, director Badham can't bear to let him die. After all, that would require an unhappy ending.

The Legacy

Cast & Crew

CAST: Katharine Ross (Maggie Walsh); Sam Elliott (Pete); Charles Gray (Karl); Lee Montague (Grandier); Hildegard Neil (Barbara).

CREW: *Directed by:* Richard Marquand. *Produced by:* David Foster. *Executive Producer:* Arnold Kopelson. *Screenplay by:* Jimmy Sangster, Patrick Tilly, Paul Wheeler. *Director of Photography:* Dick Bush, Alan Hume. *Music:* Michael J. Lewis. *Film Editor:* Anne V. Coates. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 90 minutes (approx).

DETAILS: As an old relative lies dying, a group of would-be heirs gather in an old house to see who will emerge from the struggle

victorious. As the men and women die mysteriously one at a time, one woman (Ross) realizes she will be heir to an occult legacy ... whether she likes it or not.

***Nightwing* (1979) * ***

Critical Reception

“Mr. Hiller is credited as the director of the film but it looks as if it had been put together from a child’s instruction book. The screenplay ... is terrible and the special effects third-rate.”—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*, June 29, 1979, C21.

“The special effects could make you run home and hide.”—Margaret Ronan, *Senior Scholastic*, January 25, 1979, page 30.

“Despite its high-gloss look, the movie seems many years behind its time ... dull and unterrifying.”—Alan Frank, *The Horror Film Handbook*, 1982, page 104.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Nick Mancuso (Youngman Duran); David Warner (Phillip Payne); Kathryn Harrold (Anne Dillon); Stephanie Macht (Walker Chee); George Clutesi (Abner Tasupi); Strother Martin (Selwyn); Ben Piazza (Roger Piggett); Donald Hotton (John Franklin); Alice Hirson (Claire Franklin); Charles Hallahan (Henry); Judith Novgrod (Jody); Jose Toledo (Harold Masito); Pat Corley (Vet); Charlie Bird (Beejay); Danny Zapien (Joe Mamoa); Peter Prouse (Doctor); Richard Romanato (Ben Mamoa); Flavio Martinez III (Isa Lolama); Lena Carr (Pregnant Woman); Virginia P. Maney (Old Squaw); Wade Stevens (Ambulance Attendant); Robert Dunbar, John W. Leonard, Sr. (Helicopter Pilots).

CREW: Columbia Pictures Presents a Martin Ransohoff Production of an Arthur Hiller Film, *Nightwing*. *Editor:* John C. Howard. *Production Designer:* James Yance. *Associate Producers:* Maggie Abbott, Peter V. Herald. *Music:* Henry Mancini. *Director of Photography:* Charles Rosher. *Executive Producer:* Richard St. Johns. *Screenplay:* Steve Shagan, Bud Shrake, Martin Cruz Smith. *Based on the Novel by:* Martin Cruz Smith. *Producer:* Martin Ransohoff. *Director:* Arthur Hiller. *Casting:* Lynn Stalmaster and Associates. *Unit Production Manager:* Peter V. Herald. *Assistant Director:* Gary Daigler. *Second Assistant Director:* Scott Easton. *Special Visual Effects:* Carlo Rambaldi. *Opticals:* Van Der Veer Photo Effects. *Executive Assistant to Producer:* Cathleen Summers. *Sound Effects:* Sam Shaw. *Camera Operator:* Eric Anderson. *Script Supervisor:* Marie Kenney. *Production Mixer:* Larry Jost. *Music Editor:* John C. Hammell. *Assistant Editor:* Mary Scott. *Property Master:* Syd Greenwood. *Special Effects:* Milt Rice. *Set Decorations:* Richard Kent. *Set Design:* William Skinner. *Optical Supervision:* Barry Nolan. *Musical Editor:* Arthur Piantadosi. *Dialogue Mixer:* Les Fresholtz. *Effects Mixer:* Michael Minkler. *Make-up Artist:* Del Armstrong. *Hairstylist:* Dione Taylor. *Costumers:* Don Vargas, Betsy Cox. *Stunt Coordinator:* James Arnett. *Technical Advisor:* Dr. Clay Mitchell. *Stunt Persons:* James Arnett, Glynn Rulan, Gary Epper, Craig Baxley. *"Lucille"* *Performed by:* Kenny Rogers. *"Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue"* *Performed by:* Crystal Gale. *Filmed in:* Panavision with Color by: Metrocolor. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* PG. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: In New Mexico, Sheriff Youngman Duran is called out to a desert ranch where a horse has been murdered ... drained of blood and pocked by dozens of bite marks. An old medicine man, Abner, warns Duran that everyone in the region is going to die because the local Indians, including the Americanized chief, politico Walker Chee, have forsaken the old gods for new beliefs. Worse,

Abner believes it is his destiny to die that very night. Duran ignores these warnings and continues to investigate the case of the dead horse. He visits with his white girlfriend, Anne Dillon, and learns she will be heading out to a natural spring on a camping trip. She also tells him she plans to take a job in Houston, a position that would take her far away from him.

Duran returns to Abner's place the next day and finds him dead. Also investigating at the ranch is Philip Payne, a bat specialist attempting to procure some sample tissue from Abner. Duran prevents an autopsy, and in the tradition of his people buries Abner's body himself. Meanwhile, Payne goes to see Walker Chee and warns him that deadly vampire bats are migrating to nearby caves. These bats are dangerous because they see humans as food, have incredible night vision ... and are very hungry. The news upsets Chee, who wants to bring Peabody Mining into the territory to strip-mine the sacred tribal ground.

Meanwhile, bats attack a child and Payne warns that the vampire bats may be carrying bubonic plague. He intends to track down and exterminate the bat colony before anyone else dies. Meanwhile, Anne Dillon is out camping when the bats attack again. She and a few friends make it to safety inside a parked van, but it turns over on the road while they are trying to escape. When daylight comes and the bat swarm leaves, Anne tends to her wounded friends.

Payne discovers several corpses at Anne's campsite, and continues to search for the bat lair. At the same time, Chee plans to arrest Duran so he cannot threaten the mining contract by informing federal authorities of the dangerous bat infestation. Duran escapes and heads out in the desert to find Anne. He meets up with Payne and Anne, and the trio turns its attention to hunting vampire bats.

Anne, Duran and Payne find the bats in Maskgi Canyon, the mythical home of the Indian gods—a sacred place. Duran ingests a natural herb to help “open his mind,” and has a vision of the late Abner (whose body has mysteriously vanished...). In his dream, Duran learns he will have to fight the spirit of Abner as well as the bats for the survival of the canyon and his people.

That night, bats swarm and surround the trio, who protect

themselves in an electrified mesh cage. The bats try to chew their way inside the encampment, and Payne shoots one with a tracking dart that will reveal the exact location of their lair.

The next day, the bat cavern is found. Payne and Anne block off the exit with mesh so the bats won't be able to escape. While making these preparations, Payne falls deep into the cavern and Anne and Duran must climb down to his aid. They watch, fearful, as thousands of bats cling to the walls, ready to awaken at any moment. Payne is badly injured, and Duran is distracted from his task by visions of his people's sacred city. Fighting Abner's plan to exterminate modern man for letting the old ways die, Duran lights an ammonia pool in the cave and destroys the bats. The threesome then escape the cavern at sunrise as the bat swarm burns up.



Horror film veteran David Warner prepares to fight a swarm of vampire bats in *Nightwing* (1979).

COMMENTARY: *Nightwing* is *Jaws* but with furry vampire bats instead of a sleek great white shark. Yes, Steven Spielberg's classic sea adventure has spawned yet another 1970s "when animals attack" horror movie. This one is marginally better than *Grizzly*

(1976), but a lot less fun than *Piranha* (1978). By the time of its release in 1979, *Nightwing*'s narrative moves had all been done before in numerous other '70s schlockfests, and the dependence on lackluster special effects doesn't help the film rise above its derivative story.

Should the beaches stay open? Or, in the case of *Nightwing*, should the CDC be notified of the bat infestation at the risk of losing the Peabody Mining contract? That's one of the central plot points of *Nightwing*, and it reminds one immediately of the town conspiracy of silence in *Amity*. This time, Walker Chee (Stephen Macht) fills the Murray Hamilton role. The protagonist of the film (Nick Mancuso) like good old Sheriff Brody himself, is an honest police officer who has trouble with politics and finds his own independence by challenging authority, and fighting the "beast" at hand.

The only way in which *Nightwing* differs significantly from *Jaws* is that its screenplay combines the cocky Quint and the knowledgeable Hooper characters into one person: David Warner's Philip Payne, self-described "exterminating angel." Contrarily, the most direct reference to *Jaws* occurs near the climax of *Nightwing* when three heroes (why is it always three?) lock themselves up in a mesh cage not unlike the shark cage where Hooper sought safety from the shark in *Jaws*.

Given its derivative nature, it's hard to see how *Nightwing* could have been very good, but it might have distinguished itself visually. Sometimes good special effects can save a bad plot, at least in horror movies. Instead, the film's thrills are sabotaged by laughable effects work. The campfire bat attack scene must be one of the most comical such animal attacks ever put to film. Bloated, matted model bats on wires fly into the frame, and the antiquated techniques of front and rear projection are used to combine the inadequate "animal footage" with the actors. The performers, to the delight of the audience, swat all around themselves like ninnies tilting at windmills. Worse, in some shots during this important scene, the appropriate background plates do not appear to have been included (especially in those shots filmed inside the van).

Since *Nightwing* is unable to believably establish its central threat—

the bat swarm—it never emerges as particularly scary or believable.

And that's a shame, because this is a movie that boasts an incredible knowledge of bats. We learn, for instance that vampire bats consume 1.5 times their weight in blood, and that the excess turns into ammonia. We learn about the nocturnal sweeps of 30,000 bats, and how these swarms often carry bubonic plague to populated areas. We learn how bats see better in the dark than cats, and have no fear of humans. We learn about their "echo sensitivity," and so on. It's all really pretty interesting stuff about a life form most people don't understand, and knowledge, rendered in interesting fashion, can often be scary. All of Payne's build-up makes the bat a scary nemesis, an imposing critter, but the special effects fail completely to make the threat a powerful one.

About the only place that *Nightwing* truly succeeds is in David Warner's performance. He's the film's MVP, projecting a gung-ho performance even though the script calls on him mostly to play Basil Exposition, a mouthpiece for bat trivia. But even the great Warner's presence is not enough to save a script which attempts to recreate the dynamic of *Jaws* (local lawman versus small-town conspiracy) without any of the flair or horror.

Though *Nightwing* attempts to inject originality into the *Jaws* formula by treading into the mystery world of Native American lore, even that element of the film feels hackneyed. In *Jaws*, Quint spoke mystically of the sea, and recounted the story of the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*. Abner's ravings about Native American history in *Nightwing*, interesting as they may be, feel like yet another token attempt to distinguish the film from the shark blockbuster.

LEGACY: An even more dreadful bat swarm movie was released in 1999, entitled *Bats*.

Nosferatu the Vampyre (1979) * * *

Critical Reception

"Herzog has desexualized the story in two ways:
first by a stress on the classic 1922 Murnau version

which gives his own film an air of pious re-creation, and, second, by a bothersome uncertainty of tone.... Isabelle Adjani is beautiful but perhaps too mannered.... The problem here is that Herzog was unable to bring new life to his much-handled material.”—David Barthelme, *New Yorker*, October 15, 1979, pages 183–184.

“Werner Herzog’s gift to horror-film fans ... a work sufficiently horrific but not brutal ... visually quite out of the ordinary.”—Donald C. Willis, *Horror and Science Fiction Films II*, Scarecrow Press, 1982, pages 286–287.

“...a slow moving mist of foreboding gloom. Herzog’s purpose is to depart subtly from Murnau’s film text. This film will make little sense if you have not seen and [do not] fully appreciate the original ... of interest to film buffs, but not recommended for the blood-and-guts horror fan.”—Darrell Moore, *The Best, Worst, and Most Unusual: Horror Films*, Crown Publishers, Inc., pages 42–43.

“...a unique telling of the myth that forces viewers to surrender to the world that Herzog has created ... what lies at the heart of this highly stylized film is the frightening intensity that Klaus Kinski bring to the role of Count Dracula.... Herzog never allows the viewer one crumb of comfort.”—Jeremy Berg, *Sci Fi Universe #3*: “13 Vampire Films that Don’t Suck,” November 1994.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Klaus Kinski (Count Dracula); Isabelle Adjani (Lucy); With: Bruno Ganz, Roland Tapor, Walter Ladengast, Dan Van Husen, Jan Groth, Carsten Bodinas, Martje Grohmann, Ryk De Gooyer, Clemens Scheitz, Lo Van Hensbergen, Tim Beckman, Jacques Dufilho.

CREW: Michael Gruskoff Presents a Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. *Director of Photography:* Jorg Schmidt Retwein. *Production Design:* Henning Von Gierke. *Costume Designer:* Gisela Storch. *Editor:* Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus. *Music:* Popol Vul/Florian Frick and Richard Wagner, “Rheingold.” *The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Conducted by:* Sir Georg Solti. *Cameraman:* Michael Gast. *Sound Engineer:* Harold Maury. *Perchman:* Jean Fontane. *Lighting:* Martn Gerbl. *Special Effects:* Cornelius Siegel. *English Dialogue:* Tom Schachtman, Martje Grohmann. *Dialogue Coach:* Beverly Walker. *Assistant Directors:* Remmelt Remmelts, Mirko Tichacek. *Continuity:* Anja Schmidt-Zaringer. *Make-up:* Reiko Kruk, Dominique Colladant. *Assistant Set Design:* Ulrich Bergfelder. *Wardrobe:* Ann Poppel. *Hairdresser:* Ludovic Paris. *Production Manager:* Rudolf Wolf. *Unit Manager:* Joshi Arpa. *Lighting Assistant:* Anton Urban. *Executive Producer:* Walter Saxer. *Produced, Written and Directed by:* Werner Herzog. A German-French Co-production, Werner Herzog, Film Produktion, Munich, Gaumont, S.A. Paris. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:* 95 minutes.

P.O.V.

“If you state, as some of my contemporaries do, that cinema is so much dreaming, then horror is one of the best ways of dreaming—in the ways of nightmare. That is why I went back to Murnau. To see how I could convince an audience that what was unreal was real”⁴⁶.—director Werner Herzog on his decision to resurrect *Nosferatu* (1922).

“Dracula is a man who cannot choose and cannot cease to be. He is a kind of evil, but he is also a man who is suffering”⁴⁷.—Klaus Kinski reveals his interpretation of the famous vampire.

SYNOPSIS: In Dresden, beautiful Lucy Harker awakens from a terrifying nightmare about a bat. The next morning, her husband, Jonathan, is sent by his employer, Mr. Renfield, to meet with a client in Transylvania, Count Dracula. Renfield wants to sell the count a dilapidated estate near Harker's home in Dresden.

Harker goes on his way, even after a disturbed Lucy warns he will be in danger. He travels for weeks before arriving in a small village in the Carpathian Mountains. Though warned by gypsies to go no further, Jonathan continues up the path and is transported to Dracula's strange castle via a dark carriage. At the ruined estate, he meets Dracula, a pale-faced, hawk-nosed, soft-spoken aristocrat. Jonathan dines while Dracula watches him with interest. When Harker slices his finger with a knife, Dracula desperately drinks the blood from his wound. This proves what the villagers had warned Harker about. Dracula is a vampire, *nosferatu*—the undead.

While Dracula drinks of Harker's blood and keeps him captive at the castle, Lucy senses her husband's danger. In turn, Dracula detects Lucy's interest in him. When he sees a photograph of her, he is smitten. The next day, Jonathan finds himself locked in the castle as Dracula leaves for Dresden with a carriage loaded with coffins. Understanding Lucy's danger, Jonathan escapes from the castle and begins a long trek for home. Dracula, meanwhile, takes to the sea.

Renfield, now incarcerated in an insane asylum, eats flies and warns that his master is *en route*. While Lucy's worries about Jonathan deepen, Dracula feeds on the sailors aboard the ship. The vessel finally arrives with all hands dead but for the vampire, and a plague of rats. As the town confronts the possibility of the Black Death, Dracula takes up residence in his new home.

After his long trip, Jonathan arrives home feverish. He suffers from amnesia and no longer recognizes Lucy, the wife he sought so desperately to protect. While the sick Harker is tended by the plodding Dr. Van Helsing, Dracula pays Lucy a visit. He offers salvation to Jonathan if Lucy gives herself willingly to him. Lucy refuses, and holds the vampire at bay with a crucifix.

As the rats teem across the city and Dracula drinks from the rapidly dwindling populace, Lucy realizes that she is fighting a creature of

legend, a vampire. She seeks Van Helsing's help, but his precious science will not permit him to believe in such an irrational creature. Lucy's friend Mina is soon found dead, bitten on the neck and Lucy sets out to kill Dracula. She draws him to her bedroom, aware that the first light of day can destroy him. She permits Dracula to drink her blood and the vampire is distracted by her beauty as the sun rises. Exposed to sunlight, Dracula dies, and Lucy dies too, the sun shining on her pristine face. Too late, Van Helsing realizes the error of his ways and stakes the already-deceased vampire through the heart. The surviving town elders arrest him for murder, and Jonathan turns into a vampire.

The evil of Dracula alive inside him, Jonathan rides away on his horse, carrying the scourge of death with him to another place, another time.

COMMENTARY: In 1922, legendary German director F.W. Murnau unveiled *Nosferatu*, an unofficial film adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The vampiric count was renamed Orlock in Murnau's universe, and make-up genius Max Schreck portrayed the character as a hairless, clawed, rat-like creature. His vampire was utterly inhuman in appearance and demeanor, yet his story captured the imagination of the pre-Lugosi world. The idea that the rising sun could kill a vampire was introduced, for instance, in Murnau's seminal silent film, and has now become part of established vampire lore.

In 1979, the same year that *Saturday Night Fever* helmer John Badham re-invented a handsome, romantic *Dracula* for the Bee Gees generation, controversial German director Werner Herzog took the opposite approach, exposing Dracula's universe as one distinctly anti-romantic. In remaking the moody *Nosferatu*, this time with Klaus Kinski (Renfield in Jess Franco's *Count Dracula* [1970]) as the vampire, Herzog created a strangely lyrical and beautiful film. Like its silent antecedent, this *Nosferatu* depends largely on visuals and imagery rather than words to forge its tale of an unending nightmare.

In terms of its narrative, Herzog's *Nosferatu* is a pretty straight nod to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Jonathan Harker, Lucy, Renfield, Van Helsing and Dracula all appear in the film, though the tale is set in

scenic Bismarck rather than the more commonly used London. And the action begins, as per Stoker's classic, when Jonathan Harker visits Dracula's castle in the Carpathian Mountains to sell real estate.

But unlike more traditional re-tellings of the Dracula myth, Herzog's *Nosferatu* escorts the viewer into a world of dream-like imagery, where reality and magic seem to co-exist, and dreams are signifiers of omens and dark happenings.

The film proper opens, for instance, with Isabelle Adjani (Lucy) dreaming of a bat in flight. She awakens from the dream screaming, and her make-up and emoting are evocative of a silent film—strangely stilted and off-kilter, a step removed from our sense of conventional reality. Her pale complexion even reflects the pale whites and glare of black and white film photography. Lucy later places credence in her dreams, warning Jonathan that she feels an “inner, nameless fear.” Typically, she is ignored.

From there, Jonathan makes his odyssey to Dracula's castle, and transitions into a cinematic dreamland. A tracking camera follows Harker as his path parallels a beautiful river, and there is a real sense of geography, a facet often missing from cinematic renderings of Harker's journey. The sky then darkens over snow bedecked mountains, and gray clouds roll over a blue sky as night falls. Ominous music then plays on the soundtrack as Dracula's rotting, forgotten castle is revealed in shadowy profile on the landscape ahead.

The house is like a dream itself, and exists in its own bubble of unreality, outside the beautiful land Herzog has carefully recorded. In other words, by going from beautiful nature to creepy supernatural, Herzog's camera has recorded Harker's passage from a world of reality to one of nightmares.

A visualist of the highest order, Herzog has infused the scenes around Dracula's lair with a sort of trippy, drugged-out texture. The sky moves faster in Dracula's realm thanks to fast motion photography, but time actually seems to slow to a mind-numbing crawl. It's like a nightmare that you can't awaken from ... an endless cacophony of pauses and delays. Thematically, this sense of

“time slowed” perfectly mirrors Dracula’s boring, unending existence. An immortal, he longs for the release of death, but instead continues to exist one endless day at a time, for all eternity. Once the film gets to Dracula’s world, we’re on the count’s time, and Herzog’s film assumes a different pace. Some might say it’s even boring...

Frankly, one’s patience for *Nosferatu* will depend largely on how willing a viewer is to look for the nuances and consider the experience as an active, rather than passive one. Herzog’s not interested in a real plot, for instance, only in linking events visually and metaphorically. Aside from the ongoing dream imagery, Herzog’s most prominent image in the film is that of the rat, which he deploys repetitively as a metaphor for death. Everywhere the rats go, plague and death (and Dracula) follow. Dracula’s ship carries these signifiers of sickness and rot from Transylvania to Dresden, and the hold of the vessel is seen teeming with the rats. They then mass on land, and Dresden is never the same ... its people infected with evil. The film’s dialogue further associates Dracula with the plague, noting that “the Black Death hath reaped his harvest—the plague.” Dracula is strangely rat-like in this film, and bats, of course, are flying rats, organisms that also cause disease...

If one is interested in vampirism and what it can represent in film (everything from lust, sexual intercourse and addiction, to plague), then *Nosferatu* will seem a rewarding journey because of these connections and symbols. Contrarily, viewers looking for the thrills typically associated with vampire films will find all of this intellectual gamesmanship dull. Herzog has clearly sacrificed thrills and “horror” for a more artistic approach to his material. The result is a film that feels like a dream, but not a nightmare. It’s weird, it’s disturbing, it’s nutty, but the film isn’t scary. It probably wasn’t meant to be, but horror fans will still be disappointed at the paucity of chills.

For *Dracula* historians, the 1979 *Nosferatu* may be most memorable for its revisionist look at Stoker’s *dramatis personae*. Lucy, for instance, is a resourceful, powerful fighter in *Nosferatu*, ultimately giving up her life to save Jonathan’s. Contrarily, Van Helsing is a

useless man of science. He believes as stubbornly in books and knowledge as others do in religion or superstition, and is only swayed to combat Dracula much too late. He's an ineffectual old man.

Kinski's Dracula is physically quite reminiscent of Schreck's ghoulish Count Orlock, yet Kinski has imbued his performance with an urgency and desperation that other film actors have not captured so skillfully. This Dracula is one of serious biological need. He has a tangible thirst for blood, as though he's desperately hungry to feed. Yet his need is one of sustenance, not one of power or of love. This Dracula is a heroin addict, unable to control his anger, and literally quaking for his next fix. In some senses, this Dracula is more pitiful than Lee's or Lugosi's too, since he expresses a dissatisfaction with his lonely existence and the fact he can't experience death. "It's more cruel not to die," Dracula comments woefully at one point, and the image conjured is of an addict who loathes his need for another fix at the same time that he lives for it. Where Badham imagines Dracula as a romantic, Byronic hero, Herzog makes him a tragic creature, descended from greatness but condemned to a living hell.

Herzog's *Nosferatu* is much more than a re-staging of Murnau in color and sound. It is a re-imagining of the *Dracula* mythos in a way that defies genre classification. This isn't a horror movie so much as it is a phantasm about death, decay and addiction. One of the film's most interesting moments is its opening in a dark crypt. Herzog's camera tracks across a row of decaying corpses. They lie still, open mouthed in horror, as a strange chanting grows on the soundtrack. The tracking shot continues for a long moment, exposing a ghoulish menagerie of death that is seemingly endless. This shot captures Dracula's curse. He has lived so long that death and decay follow him wherever he goes. He's an addict, and he just can't change. You almost feel sorry for him.

Phantasm (1979) * * * *

Critical Reception

“To this day, I’m not quite sure what the plot of Don Coscarelli’s weird masterpiece is all about, but whatever it was, *Phantasm* was packed with gusto, earthy performances, and a flavor for the surreal. A breath of fresh air that really benefited from its cast and its budgetary restraints—this was *Easy Rider* with a scary villain.”—Bill Latham, *Mary’s Monster*, Powys Books.

“...silly but occasionally energetic low budget shocker ... very much a cult item.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 210.

“An engaging low-budget shocker.... Coscarelli directs with an eye to humor as well as horror to good effect.”—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 351.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Michael Baldwin (Mike Pearson); Bill Thornbury (Jody Pearson); Reggie Bannister (Reggie); Kathy Lester (Lady in Lavender); Angus Scrimm (the Tall Man); Terrie Kalbus (Fortune Teller’s Granddaughter); Ron Jones (Caretaker); Susan Harper (Girlfriend); Lynn Eastman (Sally); David Arntzen (Toby); Ralph Richmond (Bartender); Cill Cope (Tommy); Laura Mann (Double Lavender); Mary Ellen Shaw (Fortune Teller); Myrtle Scott (Maid).

CREW: *Written and Directed by:* Don Coscarelli. *Produced by:* D.A. Coscarelli. *Co-Producer:* Paul Pepperman. *Music:* Fred Myrow and Malcolm

Seagrove. *Production Design*: S. Tyer. *Visual Consultant*: Roberto Quezada. *First Assistant Cameraman*: Marc Schwartz. *Second Assistant Cameraman*: Jacalyn Welan. *Unit Manager*: Robert DeValle. *Script Supervisors*: Dena Roth, Wendy Kaplan. *Art Director*: David Gavin Brown. *Cinematographer/Editor*: Don Coscarelli. *Wardrobe*: Shirl Quinlan. *Sound Recordist*: Michael Gross. *Make-up*: Shirley Mae. *Stuntman*: George W. Singer. *Assistant Editors*: Dena Roth, Roberto Quezada. *Editorial Assistants*: James Becker, Bruce G. Chudacoff. *Music Recording*: Paul Ratajczak. *Sound Effects*: Lorane Mitchell, Gene Corso. *"Sittin' Here at Midnight" by*: Bill Thornbury, Thornbury Music. *Special Effects Created by*: Paul Pepperman. *Opticals*: Westheimer Company Modern Film Effects. *Post-production Sound*: Samuel Goldwyn. *Processing*: Technicolor. *Color*: MGM Lab. *Silver Sphere Created by*: Willard Green. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 91 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: At Morningside Mausoleum, a young man named Tommy makes love to a beautiful woman. After they finish, this lady in lavender turns into a frightening old man, the Tall Man. He kills Tommy with a knife.

Tommy's best friends, Jody and Reggie, attend his funeral at the Morningside Funeral Home. Also present, but hiding in the bushes, is Jody's little brother, Mike. Mike has been acting strange lately. He has been following Jody around like a puppy, perhaps because Jody is all he has left, his parents having died recently. While hiding in the bushes, Mike spies the Tall Man single-handedly lifting Tommy's coffin out of the ground and putting it back in the rear of a hearse. This arouses Mike's suspicions, and he goes to a local fortune-teller to learn about his future.

The blind seer, accompanied by her young granddaughter, give Mike a bizarre test to control his fear. They ask him to stick his hand in a box, and it starts to burn him, but he controls his fear and his hand is left uninjured. Hours later, the fortune-teller's

granddaughter visits Morningside Funeral Home and is murdered by something grotesque.

That evening, Jody runs into the Lady of Lavender and takes her out to the Morningside grounds to make love. As usual, Mike follows Jody, but interrupts when he becomes convinced that a monster is in the brush with him. Mike's cries of panic interrupt Jody's attempt to have sex with the Lady in Lavender, and she mysteriously disappears.

As he sleeps that night, Mike dreams of the Tall Man and the mortuary, and becomes convinced that he and Jody are in danger.

Mike sneaks into the funeral parlor and hides inside a coffin as the Tall Man and his minions prowl the dark hallways in silence. Then, Mike encounters another oddity: a flying silver sphere that is a deadly weapon. It flies through the air, lands on a human head, drills into the brain, and then ejects all the blood in a fountain. Mike barely escapes this gruesome fate, but the Tall Man pursues him. Before escaping, Mike manages to break off one of the Tall Man's fingers, which bleeds yellow. Mike keeps this trophy, and then is attacked by hooded troll creatures. Still, he escapes to tell Jody his tale.

Jody is skeptical about Mike's story, but the severed finger that Mike now keeps in a box is evidence of his veracity. Soon, the finger in the box becomes a giant, red-eyed fly. It attacks Mike, but he and Jody jam it down the garbage disposal. When Reggie comes over to visit, the fly rears its ugly head again before the three men kill it.

Leaving Mike with a shotgun, Jody visits Morningside, and is attacked there by the devilish dwarfs. He shoots one and flees the grounds, but is pursued by a driver-less hearse. Mike shows up in Jody's car to drive him to safety. The hearse gives chase, but Jody opens fire with the shotgun and effectively wrecks the pursuing car. Looking inside the vehicle, Michael and Jody find a dwarf. They take his hood off and discover that the dwarf is their deceased friend, Tommy, somehow shrunk to two-thirds human size. While Reggie hides the body in his ice cream truck freezer, Jody sends Mike off to safety at the antique shop owned by a friend, Sally.

There, Mike sees a hundred-year-old photograph of the Tall Man riding a carriage in front of the funeral parlor. Mike asks to be taken home to Jody, but on the way, Sally and Mike are attacked by dwarves when they find Reggie's overturned ice cream truck. Mike survives the attack and escapes.

Together, Jody and Mike head to Morningside and are pursued by the Tall Man, driving his evil hearse again. After surviving this battle and another with the flying silver sphere, the brothers meet up with Reggie, who is not dead after all. Together, the trio finds a white room that is the portal to the Tall Man's world. Mike realizes that the dwarves, deceased humans, are being shipped through the portal to be slave labor on the Tall Man's planet! Mike is almost sucked through the space gate, but Jody pulls him back. In his brief time at the portal, Mike has a vision of the alien planet: a vast, dry world where slave labor stretches to a distant, crimson horizon. As Mike tells Reggie and Jody of what he learned, dwarves attack and the three heroes are separated.

Reggie shuts down the portal, understanding that the mechanism operates on the same principles as a tuning fork. Outside the portal, Reggie is then murdered by the Lady in Lavender.

With the gate closed, the Morningside Mortuary vanishes in a flash and Jody and Mike resolve to end the Tall Man's reign of terror by trapping him in a mine shaft some thousand feet deep. The Tall Man pursues Mike, who conquers his fears, and defeats the villain. The monster is trapped in the shaft.

Suddenly, Mike awakens in his bed. Things are not as they seemed. Though Reggie is alive, Jody is dead—a victim of a car accident. Reggie tells the boy not to worry, that they can skip town together and leave the sad past behind. Mike agrees, but when he returns to his room upstairs, the Tall Man is waiting for him...

COMMENTARY: No synopsis can really do *Phantasm* justice. This is another '70s horror film that, like *Nosferatu*, purposely inhabits the half-understood sphere of dreams rather than what one might term conventional horror "reality." A phantasm is defined as "a fantastic sequence of haphazardly associative imagery, as in dreams," and that wording defines this film better than synopsis or review. This is

a movie that, on a rational narrative level, makes no sense whatsoever. Yet, on careful dissection, this ambitious movie emerges as the “heroic” dream fantasy of a lonely boy who feels haunted by death and betrayed by life. When viewed under this microscope of psychology and the subconscious, *Phantasm* is a highly meaningful film about two constants of the human condition: mourning and death.

Phantasm boasts a strange child-like quality, almost like a Hardy Boy’s mystery where “something sinister” is happening at the local cemetery. That description should not be misinterpreted as a put-down. It isn’t. Instead, the film beautifully captures the world-view of Mike, a pre-adolescent boy, the film’s leading character, and the movie’s primary “percipient.” In fact, every bizarre event that happens in *Phantasm* can easily be interpreted as having occurred in one of the boy’s twisted dreams/nightmares.

In the sad “reality” proposed by the surprise climax of *Phantasm*, Mike’s beloved older brother Jody is irrevocably dead. The rest of the film, then, can be seen in relation to that context. It’s a disturbed child’s anxiety dream as he mourns the loss of his family. Mike’s parents are dead, his brother is dead, and he fears being alone in this world. That fear manifests itself in his dreams. Since his dreams are also his fantasy—in which anything is possible—Jody is still alive and well. But, reflecting the suppressed truth of reality, Mike has a difficult time keeping up with his brother. “Jody’s leaving soon,” he obsesses.

In one particular shot, abandonment is portrayed in visual terms. Mike runs desperately after Jody as his older brother rides down a long road on a bike ... oblivious to his brother’s pursuit. This “chase” embodies Mike’s fear of being abandoned. Jody is on a journey away from him that Mike can simply never have access to. He can run after Jody, but he’ll never catch up to him again, at least not in this life.

Even deeper than sequences visually embodying abandonment, *Phantasm* assumes Mike’s childish view of sex and women. In his phantasm, the Tall Man transforms into the beautiful Lady in Lavender. She is beautiful and sexy, and lures Mike’s friends and loved ones away. To the child, sex is an unknown to be both feared

and desired. In the most simple sense, Mike is jealous of women in general (and the Lady in Lavender specifically) because they take Jody's attention away from Mike, just as death has taken him away

It is no accident that the Lady in Lavender is a killer. A woman can steal away an older brother as easily as a car accident can, and that is how Mike's subconscious views the situation. Throughout the film, sex and death are equated in this way. Tommy, another friend of Mike's, is lured to his death by his desire for sex too. In Mike's dream world, the moaning of lovemaking very quickly becomes the groaning of a monster in the bushes. The two ideas are linked.

Described in the most succinct fashion, *Phantasm* is a 90-minute dream in which a lonely boy mentally defeats his subconscious personification of death. The dream context is important because in "real life" Michael can't undo Jody's death. There is no victory over death in reality, and Mike's dream (this film as it were...), is a response to that. In the dream, his mind rejects that notion of death much as people in mourning deny the death of loved ones. The Tall Man embodies death, and Mike is the hero that can defeat him in his dream.

How can this reading of the film be substantiated? If one looks at Mike's survival rate in *Phantasm*, it is clearly too good. He escapes dwarves when Sally and Susie are attacked, and survives the deadly silver sphere and all his encounters with the physically imposing Tall Man. Just as dreams are inevitably centered around the perception of self (and we always survive our own dreams...), so is *Phantasm* a dream centered around Mike's ego and identity, because he is the dreamer and we are watching the dream through his eyes. It is his "phantasm" the audience witnesses, one in which he can play hero, save Jody, and defeat death. It is wish fulfillment and nightmare at the same time.

Just as a dream (or a nightmare) obeys no rules but those particular to the dreamer's psychology, so does *Phantasm* flout traditional film conventions. This is a horror film in which the rules of reality are constantly being re-written. A woman (the Lady in Lavender) becomes a man without warning. Jody is alive one moment, then dead the next. There is no one driving the evil hearse (as the film's dialogue confirms twice), but then a dwarf is seen behind the

wheel. A photograph is still and dead, and then it comes to animated life. The earth is hard and intractable, and then two gravestones pop out of the ground inexplicably. The mortuary is there, and then it's gone. The Tall Man's severed finger becomes a giant fly, and so on. It's as if the dreamscape is constantly being reshaped by whatever demons Mike's mind is playing out.

This is a daring and unique structure for a horror film, and yet it makes sense in its own demented way. This film is called *Phantasm*, and so it embodies the phantasm of a boy who can't deal with his real life because it is just too sad to face.

With its Tubular Bells-style soundtrack, and striking horror imagery, *Phantasm* is one of the most distinctive and individual of the 1970s genre films. The silver ball is a nightmare tool that could only exist in a boy's terrible dream, and Scrimm's Tall Man is an icon of terror: a big old man with a crunched-up, cruel face. With his deep, harsh voice and odd stride, he is the living embodiment of every child's fear of adults. Both the ball and the Man have become towers of terror, signifying the stuff of nightmares.

Yet *Phantasm*, like any dream, also has moments that are touching. The last shot of Jody in the film is simultaneously one of triumph and letting go. He stands far away, atop a hill, back-lit like a beautiful angel. He whoops in victory over Mike's defeat of the Tall Man. But then—*boom*—Mike wakes up and Jody is still dead; and death still exists in the real world. In life, there can be no victory over the Tall Man, because he represents our mortality. That image of Jody, victorious atop the hill, suddenly seems so sad, out of reach...

Other than one derivative scene (which involves the Gom Jabbar "fear" test and appears to be lifted right out of Herbert's novel *Dune*), *Phantasm* is a complete original, a horror film that has the audacity to inhabit a disturbed boy's mental landscape. The film doesn't make sense in a traditional manner, but if one reads the signs, it's an intimate exploration of our deepest human fear: losing the ones we love. It acknowledges the fact that we can never beat death except in our subconscious wishes. As the Tall Man is prone to say, "You think you go to Heaven ... you come to us!" How true that is. We'll all have our inevitable rendezvous with death, and can

only hope that in death there is peace and comfort, not an embodiment of our deepest childhood fears.

LEGACY: Thanks to Coscarelli's fine direction, *Phantasm* is now considered a horror classic, and the Tall Man (Angus Scrimm) has become an icon like Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, Pinhead, and Chucky. To date, there have been three sequels: *Phantasm II: The Ball is Back* (1988), *Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead* (1993), and *Phantasm IV: Oblivion* (1999). The last two were released directly to video.

Prophecy (1979) * * ½

Critical Reception

"*Prophecy* is like an ill-cut jigsaw puzzle re-assembled by force by someone who has lost a few of the pieces.... The plot thickens and thins under the guidance of an appropriately heavy-footed symphonic score, until it is irretrievably mutilated, along with virtually all of the cast, upon the arrival of the monster."—Susan Lardner, *New Yorker*, July 2, 1979, pages 66–67.

"Unfortunately, *Prophecy* begins to unravel the first time we get a good look at the monster, a berserk mess that resembles a nightmare version of Smokey the Bear. Unseen it is horrifying enough but the more often we see it, the less frightening it becomes, and by the time the climax rolls around the monster has become as familiar—and as non-threatening, as an old, albeit misshapen shoe...."—Kenneth Turan, *Progressive*, September 1979, pages 38–39.

"...*Prophecy* retread some of the hoariest science-fiction clichés in a ludicrous package. The finished film was very much like a person with no sense of humor trying to tell a hilarious joke he doesn't know is funny.... *The Prophecy* seems like two

movies. The first half was stylish and ominous. The second half was a string of trite chases and shopworn scare tactics.”—Richard Meyers, *SF 2*, Citadel Press, 1984, page 119.

“I must admit that I not only liked John Frankenheimer’s *Prophecy*, I actually saw it three times.... For me, settling into *Prophecy* is as comfortable as settling into an old easy-chair and visiting with good friends. All the components are there; Robert Foxworth could as easily be Hugh Marlowe from *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* or Richard Carlson in *It Came from Outer Space* or Richard Denning in *The Black Scorpion*.... The monster is pretty hokey-looking.... But I loved that old monster, spiritual sister to *Godzilla*, *Mighty Joe Young*, *Gorgo* ... the monster in *Prophecy* gave me back a splended part of my misspent youth....”—Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, a Berkley Book, 1981, pages 205–206.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Talia Shire (Maggie); Robert Foxworth (Rob); Armande Assante (John Hawks); Richard Dysart (Isely); Victoria Racimo (Ramona); George Clutesi (M’Rai); Evans Evans (Cellist); Livingston Holms (Black Woman); Tom McFadden (Pilot); Charles H. Gray (Sheriff); Burke Byrnes (Father); Mia Bendixsen (Girl); Johnny Timko (Boy); Graham Jarvis (Shusette); Everette L. Creach (Kelso); Jams H. Burk, Rob Terhane, Lon Katzman (Rescuers); Steve Shemayme, John Shemayme (Indians); Jaye Durkus (Sheriff’s Deputy); Renato Moore (Tenement Boy); Mel Waters, Roosevelt Smith, Eric Mansker (Tenement Men); Cheri Bergen (Social Worker); Cliff Hutchison (Stage Manager); Thomas P. May (Lumberjack).

CREW: Paramount Pictures Presents a John

Frankenheimer Film, a Robert L. Rosen Production, *Prophecy*. Casting: Lynn Stalmaster. Music: Leonard Rosenman. Editor: Tom Rolf. Production Design: William Craig Smith. Director of Photography: Harry Stradling, Jr. Written by: David Seltzer. Produced by: Robert L. Rosen. Directed by: John Frankenheimer. Set Decorator: George Gaines. Property Master: Ray Mercer, Jr. Costume Designer: Ray Summers. Special Effects: Robert Dawson. Stunt Coordinator: Bill Burton, Everett L. Creach. Unit Production Manager: Alan Levine. Assistant Director: Andy Stone. Second Assistant Director: Robert Cohen, Paul Tucker. Special Make-up and Artifacts Designed by: Thomas R. Burman and Manufactured by: Thomas Burman, Ellis Burman, Edouard Henriques at the Burman Studio. Make-up: Ron Snyder. Hairstylist: Ann Wadlington. Sound Mixer: Gene Cantames. Music Editor: Jim Henrikson. Sound Effects Editor: W.R. Kowalchuk, Cecelia Hall. Script Supervisor: John Franco. Titles and Optical: Modern Film Effects. Production Illustrator: Sherman Labby. Stunts: Gilbert B. Combs, Ruth Redfern, Patty Eler, Pamela Bebermayer, Mike Adams, Janet Brody, Sandy Robertson, Jerry Gaffin, Hank Hooker, Buddy Joe Hooker, John Roselius, Cliff McLaughlin, Gene McLaughlin, Tommy Madden, Jerry Maren, Ron Burke, James Caliendo, Gary M. Combes, Sandy Gimpel, Don Fox Greene. Mimes: Tommy McLoughlin, Charles Flemmer, Kevin Hall. Filmed in Panavision. Color by: Movielab. M.P.A.A. Rating: PG. Running Time: 96 minutes.

P.O.V.

“That [*Prophecy*] had a marvelous script, but was a terrible film.... I asked him [John Frankenheimer] why he bought the *Prophecy* script if he was going to change everything and ruin it. He told me he thought it was a little too wild. The creature was entirely different looking in the original story....

We ended up with a bear with strawberry jam on his face!”⁴⁸.—composer Leonard Rosenman on *Prophecy* (1979).

SYNOPSIS: In a forest in Maine, a search party is murdered by a feral, monstrous animal. In New York City, an environmentalist named Rob is assigned to determine the destiny of that very forest, because it stands in the middle of a dispute between American Indians and a paper mill. Rob heads to the forest with his wife, Maggie, who has just learned she is pregnant.

Once in Maine, Rob and Maggie meet with Mr. Isely, a paper mill executive. He tells them that a team of lumberjacks and their rescuers have disappeared in the woods and he suspects Indians are responsible. He thinks they are trying to bring to life an ancient legend about a monster with the eyes of a dragon. En route to the woods and the cabin where they will be staying, a group of Indians blockade the road. There, Rob meets the militant leader of the Indian resistance, John. There is a stand-off over passage, and lumberjacks and Indians fight.

Later, Rob and Maggie reach their cabin across a beautiful river. Rob catches a fish and spies a giant salmon in the river. As they dine on his catch, Maggie brings up the idea of children, but is met with resistance. A frenzied, ferocious raccoon then breaks into the house. Rob throws it into the fireplace.

Rob meets with John and his wife, Ramona, and learns that the Indian people are slowly losing their faculties. Their babies are being born deformed, and John suspects a contaminant from the paper mill operation. John takes Rob to a village where they meet an old Indian. He tells them of Indian legends, and shows them a mutated, enlarged tadpole. Rob realizes the paper mill feeds water right into that part of the river. He visits the mill to determine if it is using chemicals and dumping them in the forest. He finds evidence of mercury use by the company. Mercury is cheap and effective in the mill’s refining process but it contaminates the brain. Worse, it can jump the placental barrier and deform the fetus, a fact that terrifies Maggie since she has eaten contaminated fish.

That night, a family of campers are attacked and murdered. Police

attempt to arrest John for the crime, but he flees even as Rob collects blood samples to prove his mercury theory. Rob, Maggie and Ramona fly to the crime scene to confirm John's innocence. They meet him there and he shows them claw marks high up in the trees. A storm rolls in, jeopardizing helicopter flight out of the forest. Then, in trapping nets, they find mutated animal infants and decide to keep them as evidence of the mill's contamination. Still unable to fly out of the forest, the group makes for the old man's village a half-mile away. They tend to the mutant baby, keeping it alive, and bring Isley in to see the results of mercury poisoning. Then a mutant bear attacks, forcing Rob and his group to escape in underground tunnels. They hide with the mutant baby until the next morning and a repentant Isley heads for a communication post to get help. He is pursued and killed by the bear.

The others find the Indian village abandoned and take a truck to reach town. As night falls again, they are pursued by the mutant bear, and the helicopter pilot is murdered. They cross the river, making for Rob and Maggie's cabin. The bear kills the old native man and pursues the runners across the river.

Rob, John, Ramona and Maggie barricade themselves in the cabin, but the mutant bear crashes through the roof. They shoot at it as it demolishes the house and kills John. Rob stabs the beast to death with John's arrows.

As Maggie and Rob fly home for New York City, another mutant bear rears its head in the forest below...

COMMENTARY: The message of the clumsy horror film *Prophecy* is a familiar one to long-time horror aficionados: "Do not tamper in God's domain." In the 1970s, fears of an environmental apocalypse replaced the atomic issues of the 1950s, but the core message is identical. Tampering with Mother Nature just isn't a good idea. In proffering this timeworn notion about preserving Mother Earth, *Prophecy* is sometimes obvious, sometimes clever in its approach. The monster attack scenes are very much the same way: often effective, and often ridiculous. What emerges is a retro-monster movie that is strangely enjoyable as a guilty pleasure, even while it looks like a relic in the age of *Alien* (1979).

The best scene in *Prophecy* occurs at Isely's paper mill, and has nothing whatsoever to do with mutants or supernatural monsters. Instead, Frankenheimer's intrepid camera tours a real-life paper facility, a massive industrial park dedicated to transforming nature's logs into shredded pulp. Filmed in both exterior and interior, with long informative pans across its girth, the mill is revealed to be an ugly, dehumanizing place dedicated solely to environmental destruction. Chemicals such as chlorine are used there, and the inside of the plant is bathed in an ugly, sterile green-white light. There, vast, terrible machines (used for bleaching and the like) go mindlessly about their thing, and Frankenheimer's point is made. No preaching is necessary because one of the prime gifts of film is that it can *show* people things they've never seen before. This sequence in *Prophecy* may have very little to do with the plot of a rampaging mutant bear, but it reveals to viewers that the debate about the environment is not just a hypothetical or intellectual one. Trees are being destroyed now. Forests are dying. Contaminants are being dumped.

On the same tour of the paper mill Dysart's character, an exec in the paper company, notes that he just supplies "but *you* demand." He then asks Rob, and by extension, the audience, if they know how much paper it takes to make just one book. This is quite a damaging accusation, but Frankenheimer has backed it all up with the physical tour of the plant. This doesn't feel like heavy-handed moralizing, it feels real, and for a few moments, *Prophecy* earns the right to wear its liberal heart on its sleeve.

But then that moment passes, and *Prophecy* gets back to its real heart: schlocky special effects and scare sequences with mutant animals. Frankenheimer stages some of these scenes effectively, such as the death of a camper hiding inside a sleeping bag. The giant bear slaps the unfortunate victim about in the sack like a rag doll, and then hurls it back some 20 feet onto what looks like a very painful rock. It's a savage and disgusting moment, and kind of fun too.

Less fun, and wholeheartedly ridiculous, is the sequence in which a so-called "ferocious" raccoon breaks into Rob's cabin and attacks Maggie. This is a ridiculous sequence for two reasons. First,

raccoons tend not to be the most frightening of creatures, and secondly, this closely mirrors a scene in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* in which a squirrel wreaks havoc on a Christmas tree. One scene is played for horror, the other for laughs, but they are virtually identical in execution.

Also unintentionally funny, as many critics have pointed out, is *Prophecy's* *coup de théâtre*: the monster bear. This is a big shaggy monster that will terrify anyone under the age of six, but leave anyone over that threshold guffawing with laughter at the shabbiness of the thing. At the same time that some genre authorities (such as Stephen King) may consider this monster charming, and part of some unintended homage to classic bad monster movies, it is also utterly incapable of generating fear in the audience. The more the bear is revealed, the less effective it becomes as a villain and the more *Prophecy* falls apart. The monster suit in *Alien* lived up to and surpassed audience expectations. The monster suit in *Prophecy* fails to meet even the most rudimentary expectations.

The final straw damning *Prophecy* to the ash-heap of history is its half-baked, unresolved conclusion. The most suspenseful aspect of the film involves Maggie and her reproductive choices. She is pregnant, but hiding her condition from Rob because he is one of those liberal whiners who thinks it is wrong to bring new life into so awful a world. Unknowingly, Maggie has consumed contaminated fish on her trip to the country, and it is revealed that such mercury poisoning can “jump the placental barrier” to adversely affect a developing embryo. Thus, throughout the film, the audience fears that Talia Shire (Maggie) is waiting to give birth to some kind of deformed creature, not unlike the hideous bear-thing. But the film really drops the ball here because it never caps this sub-plot with any punctuation, after milking it for the better part of two acts.

The film ends without Maggie giving birth, without deciding whether to have an abortion, without even an acknowledgment that her child may be in real jeopardy. *Prophecy* just culminates with that stupid ending (another mutant bear popping out of the wilderness), and ignores the much more interesting character

debate involving Maggie's pregnancy.

John Frankenheimer is a good director, and even in its silliest moments, *Prophecy* has some beautifully orchestrated moments. There are some nicely composed shots of the bear creature as it crosses a mist-filled river, and some awe-inspiring panoramas of the forest, accompanied by stirring classical music. These moments of taste and beauty stand out amidst the preponderance of schlock. If the director had the skill to compose scenes of such loveliness, not to mention scenes with the raw power of the one at the paper mill, how could he have let that stupid bear costume remain in the film?

***Tourist Trap* (1979) * * ***

Critical Reception

“...the film wields an eerie, spooky power. Wax figures begin to move and come to life in a ruined, out-of-the-way tourist resort; there are a number of effective, atmospheric shots of the dummies’ blank eyes and reaching hands, and the special effects are effective. As a film that deals with the queer power that inanimate dummies, mannequins, and human replicas can sometimes cast over us, it is a more effective film than the expensive and ill-advised film made from William Goldman’s best seller, *Magic*.”—Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, A Berkley Book, 1981, page 211.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Chuck Connors (Slausen); Jocelyn Jones (Molly); Jon Van Ness (Jerry); Robin Sherwood (Eileen); Tanya Roberts (Beck); Dawn Jeffory (Tina); Keith McDermott (Woody); Shailar Coby (Davey).

CREW: Irwin Yablans Presents a Compass International/Manson International Release.
Charles Band Productions Presents *Tourist Trap*. Art

Director: Robert A. Burns. *Editor:* Ted Nicolaou.
Director of Photography: Nicholas Van Sternberg.
Music: Pino Donaggio. *Conducted by:* Natale
Massara. *Executive Producer:* Charles Band. *Written
by:* David Schmoeller, J. Larry Carroll. *Produced by:*
J. Larry Carroll. *Directed by:* David Schmoeller.
Consultant to Producer: Richard Band. *Mimes:*
Arlecchino, Victoria Richart, Millie Dill. *Stunt
Coordinator:* Sandra Gimpel. *Special Effects:* Richard
O'Helmer. *Special Masks & Mannequin Effects:* David
Ayres, Robert A. Burns, Ken Horn, Karen Stern, Ve
Neill. *Associate Producer:* Leonard Baker. *Production
Coordinator:* Debra Michaelson. *First Assistant
Director:* Ron Underwood. *Second Assistant Director:*
David Wyler. *Script Supervisor:* Meredith Kibbee.
Production Assistants: Jim Charleston, Maria
Mazloom, Steve Purvis, Marty Layton. *Make-up:* Ve
Neill. *Wardrobe:* Christine Boyar. *Assistant
Wardrobe:* Jessica Doyle. *Camera Operator:* Lowell
Peterson. *First Assistant Camera:* David Schmeir.
Second Assistant Camera: Michael Stone. *Still
Photography:* Robert Harmon. *Assistant Film Editor:*
Becky Navert, Gloria Gunn. *Sound Effects:* Ted
Nicolaou, Gloria Gunn, Laurence Jacobs. *Dialogue
Editor:* Popside Productions, Inc. *Re-recording Mixer:*
David Dockendorf. *Assistant Art Director:* Mary
Church. *Associate Art Director:* Jim Allen. *Set Design:*
Amanda Flick. *Location Sound:* Courtney M. Goodin.
Sound: Glen Glenn. *Color:* Metrocolor. *Titles and
Opticals:* MGM. *M.P.A.A. Rating:* R. *Running Time:*
95 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: After his car breaks down on a deserted country road, a young man named Woody stops at a gas station for help. In short order, he is murdered by animate mannequins.

Woody's friends, Tina, Jerry, Molly and Eileen, follow his trail to Slausen's Lost Oasis, an out-of-the-way tourist trap. When their car inexplicably breaks down, the girls go skinny-dipping in a hot spring while Jerry tends to repairs. At the hot spring, the girls meet

Mr. Slausen, the oddball proprietor of the gas station and Lost Oasis. He invites them to stay at the museum while he and Jerry fix the car. Once at the museum—a place of strange wax figures—Slausen reveals how his beloved wife died recently. He also warns the girls not to visit the isolated house behind the tourist trap because his demented brother, Davey, lives there.

A curious Eileen goes to Davey's house anyway, suspecting that Slausen is hiding something. She hears voices inside, and lets herself in. In short order, mannequins attack her, and a masked stranger uses telekinesis to choke her with her own scarf.

Slausen returns to the museum, angry that Eileen has been snooping about. Meanwhile, Becky and Molly note that one of the museum's mannequins resembles Slausen's dead wife. Suspicious now, Becky follows Eileen to Davey's house. She too is stalked and attacked by a masked stranger and dozens of mannequins. She is knocked unconscious and then carried into the basement, where Jerry and another tourist are being held captive. Before Jerry and Becky's eyes, the tourist is murdered as the strange killer pours plaster on her face and suffocates her.

The madman sets off after Molly next. Slausen rescues her and tells her that Davey is a murderer. He offers to transport her to the local police, but then takes her to Davey's house instead. Molly soon realizes Slausen suffers from a split personality: part Davey and part Slausen. While Molly is locked in a bedroom, Jerry and Becky break free from the basement. Slausen pursues, and plants a hatchet in the base of Becky's skull. Next, he returns to torment Molly, claiming she reminds him of his dead wife. He then reveals the true story of his wife's death, and how he used his "power" to punish her and Davey for an illicit affair.

Suddenly Jerry bursts in to rescue Molly ... but he is a mechanized, mannequin trick. Driven to the point of insanity, Molly kills Slausen with a hatchet. Now, Molly is downright certifiable. She continues on her vacation ... with mannequins of her friends in the back seat of the car...

COMMENTARY: *Tourist Trap* is the unholy conjunction of Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and

Brian DePalma's *Carrie*. Those are three incredible horror films to emulate, so *Tourist Trap* has stolen from the best of the best. And though the characters in the drama are as thin as cardboard, director David Schmoeller has nonetheless created an unnerving terror trap packed with genuine terror and some gruesome special effects. It's better and more fun than the average *Friday the 13th* installment. As the seventies moved into the eighties, and horror films fell into a creative rut, that is a high compliment indeed.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre may be *Tourist Trap*'s most obvious antecedent. In both films, hip youngsters pull off-road at a remote, isolated location, run afoul of a rundown gas station and—*boom*—descend into a house of horrors and encounter a deranged person in a bizarre mask.

The *Psycho* template comes from Slausen's situation. He's a lunatic running a "tourist trap" instead of an old motel, and assumes the personality not of his dead mother, but of his dead brother (who he also killed...). At one point in the film, Slausen even notes that the "highway has moved away" from his little tourist trap museum, dialogue that is word for word what Norman Bates told Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in the Hitchcock picture.

The *Carrie* reference stems from the simple fact that Slausen, like Spacek's misunderstood teen, is capable of wreaking great destruction because of telekinetic powers. And incidentally, Pino Donaggio wrote the score for both *Carrie* and *Tourist Trap*, so there are some sound-alike elements to the film too.



A pain in the neck: Tanya Roberts is executed by tomahawk in *Tourist Trap* (1979).

The fusion of all of these horror film templates into one project may sound like an unlikely formula for success, but *Tourist Trap* is a pretty scary movie, and it reaches a groove of madness that is truly disturbing. It features a mad party of sorts (again shades of Tobe Hooper's work), and, like the *Halloween* films, highlights a villain who is always one step ahead, no matter what the protagonist does to escape. Molly steps into a pond to hide from Slausen at one point, and he is already there, underwater and waiting to pop up and grab her. It isn't particularly rational or innovative, but the idea of an all-knowing, all-powerful bogeyman remains scary. And it's the kind of moment that horror movie fans relish. We get to shout at the screen, "Look out behind you!" while ever conscious that no scantily clad protagonist in horror films ever looks behind her.

Mannequins come to terrifying life in *Tourist Trap*, their lifeless jaws flapping and yapping in an obscene imitation of human faces, and it's a pretty scary sight too. Again, one is reminded of film and TV antecedents, particularly *The Twilight Zone* (1959–64) episode "The After Hours," in which living mannequins in a department store

called out menacingly to one of their brethren (actress Anne Francis). It was creepy on Serling's show, and it's creepy here too. The idea that inanimate objects can come to life is an old, yet powerful one in the genre, and Schmoeller gets to indulge in all fashions of "cat and mouse" games as people are mistaken for mannequins, and vice versa.

Part of the overall creep factor of this movie stems from the fact that—like *Phantasm* or *Nosferatu*—*Tourist Trap* seems to exist exclusively in a nightmare world, a malevolent reality where "unreal" events can and do occur. A phone rings ... but it isn't plugged in; Jerry looks alive one moment, but then becomes no more than a collection of spare parts the next, and so forth. It's a "deconstructed" reality in more senses than one, and it is appropriate that the film's lead, Molly, leaves the picture utterly insane ... a mental shambles. She has literally taken a detour to Hell. The more literal-minded fan will find this kind of story, with its unexplained telekinesis and wild coincidences, utterly nonsensical, but hey, nightmares are inherently nonsensical too, so why shouldn't our cinema nightmares echo that pattern?

In the final analysis, *Tourist Trap* doesn't make the cut as a great horror film because it fails to provide the audience a protagonist worthy of its demented antagonist. Michael Myers had to combat Dr. Loomis and the resourceful Laurie Strode: quite a duo. The Devil of *The Exorcist* had to confront Fathers Merrin and Karras. The point is that Dracula should always have a Van Helsing with whom to match wits. *Tourist Trap* fails in that area, and never seems to care much about its undistinguished young leads. Though the attractive Tanya Roberts is in the bunch, neither she nor the rest of the protagonists develop beyond the standard and boring role of victim. That gives evil an unfair edge in *Tourist Trap*, especially with the charismatic Chuck Connors representing the bad team, and it ultimately makes the picture less fun than it could have been had the audience really been solidly behind Molly.

Still, the mannequins are scary, the special effects are remarkable and the murder scenes are well-orchestrated, terrifying bits of celluloid set to Donaggio's stirring notes. Those are three primary reasons to see horror films, aren't they?

***When a Stranger Calls* (1979) * * * ½**

Critical Reception

“This is one of the strangest, most oddly composed ‘scare’ films in this viewer’s memory.... This, incidentally, makes it very interesting and well-worth recommending.... Take it as an extremely engrossing oddity and leave it at that.”—Jeffrey Wells, *Films in Review*, Volume XXX, Number 9.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Charles Durning (Detective John Clifford); Carol Kane (Jill Johnson/Lockart); Colleen Dewhurst (Tracy Fuller); Tony Beckley (Curt Duncan); Rachel Roberts (Dr. Monk); Ron O’Neal (Lt. Charles Garber); Steven Anderson (Steven Lockart); Rutanya Alda (Mrs. Mandrakis); Carmen Agenziano (Dr. Mandrakis); Kristen Larkin (Nancy); Bill Boyett (Sgt. Sacker); Heeru (Houseboy); Joe Reale (Bartender); Ed Wright (Retired Man); Michael Champion (Bill); Louise Wright (Retired Woman); Carol O’Neale (Mrs. Garber); Dennis McMullen (Maintenance Man); Wally Taylor (Cheater); John Tabvansen (Bar Customer); Sara Dammon (Biance Lockart); Richard Bail (Stevie Lockart); Lenora May (Sharon); Randy Holland (Maitre d’); Trent Dolan (Policeman #1); Fank DiElsi (Policeman #2); Arell Blanton (Policeman #3); DeForest Goran (Officer #1); Charles Boswell (Officer #2).

CREW: Distributed by Columbia Pictures. Melvin Simon Presents a Barry Krost Production, *When a Stranger Calls*. *Editor:* Sam Vitale. *Production Designer:* Elayne Barbara Ceder. *Music:* Dana Kaproff. *Director of Photography:* Don Peterman. *Executive Producer:* Melvin Simon, Barry Krost. *Written by:* Steve Feke, Doug Chapin. *Directed by:*

Fred Walton. *Associate Producer*: Larry Kostroff. *Unit Production Manager*: Barbara Michaels. *First Assistant Director*: Ed Ledding. *Script Supervisor*: Barbara Hogan. *Camera Operator*: Brice Mack III. *Hairstylist*: Ruby Ford. *Property Master*: Martin Mariat. *Stunt Coordinator*: Stan Barrett. *Special Effects*: B & D Special Effects. *Titles and Optical*: Westheimer Company. *Casting*: Penny Perry. A TMC Development. *M.P.A.A. Rating*: R. *Running Time*: 97 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: Teenager Jill Johnson has been hired to baby sit the two children of Dr. Mandrakis and his wife. The children are already in bed when Jill arrives, and everything seems normal. However, after she is left alone in the house with the sleeping children, Jill receives disturbing phone calls. The caller keeps asking: *“Have you checked the children?”* The phone calls become more frequent and finally the caller asks, angry, *“Why haven’t you checked the children?”*

Afraid a psychopath is watching her from somewhere in the neighborhood, Jill calls the police. The police are dismissive at first, but Jill is persistent that she is in danger. The police agree to trace the obscene caller the next time he rings Jill’s number.

A terrified Jill waits, and soon enough, the phone rings. Jill keeps the caller on the phone long enough for the police to complete their trace, and they call Jill immediately to tell her to get out of the house. As it turns out, the threatening phone calls are coming from another line inside the Mandrakis residence! Jill runs for the front door as something moves in the dark upstairs. Thankfully, Detective John Clifford and several policemen arrive in time to save Jill from the psychopath, Curt Duncan. Unfortunately, the psycho killer has slaughtered the Mandrakis children.

Seven years later, John Clifford has left the police force and become a private investigator. One day, he meets with Dr. Mandrakis, who informs him that Curt Duncan has escaped from the lunatic asylum where he was incarcerated. Afraid that Duncan will murder more children, Mandrakis asks Clifford to hunt him down. Clifford, who remembers the horrors of the Duncan case particularly well, makes

it his mission in life to apprehend ... and kill ... Curt Duncan so history will not repeat itself.

The deranged Curt Duncan, loose on the streets, takes up where he left off years earlier. He attempts to strike up a friendship with Tracy Fuller, a woman he meets at a watering hole called Torchy's. Duncan follows Fuller home, but she rebuffs him. He promises to return, and Fuller reluctantly teams with Clifford to catch him should he come back. On another night, Duncan sneaks into Tracy's home and hides in her hall closet. Clifford intervenes before Tracy can be harmed, but now the chase is on.

The story of Curt Duncan concludes where it began as Curt tracks down Jill Johnson, now Jill Lockart, the babysitter who escaped his grasp years earlier. While Jill and her husband celebrate his promotion at a restaurant, Duncan sneaks into their house and gains close proximity to the children. Jill rushes home to check on her kids when Curt calls the restaurant and then taunts her with the phrase "*Have you checked the children?*" The Lockart home checks out as safe, but Jill is not convinced that Duncan has left her alone. That night, she hears noises in downstairs and gets up from bed to investigate. When she returns, Duncan is in her bed, waiting to spring. As Jill fights with Curt Duncan, John Clifford arrives and puts his long manhunt to rest by shooting Duncan several times.

COMMENTARY: "Have you checked the children?" That chilling question has become the stuff of film legend and the foundation of popular horror films such as 1996's *Scream*, which also posits the notion of a serial killer taunting a victim by telephone. And though *Black Christmas* (1974) explored the concept (much) less successfully, *When a Stranger Calls* deserves some credit for exercising the scenario to its fullest and most horrific potential. The opening vignette of *When a Stranger Calls* is, without exaggeration, one of the most terrifying scenes ever put to film, and a masterwork of suspense. Unfortunately, there is simply no way the rest of the film can live up to this breathless, brilliantly staged opening sequence, and one is left with a feeling of anticlimax by the end of the film. It's still a good thriller, to be sure, but those opening fifteen minutes nearly launch *When a Stranger Calls* into the exalted category of a *Halloween* (1978), or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984).

Nearly.

The fifteen minute preamble of *When a Stranger Calls* should be studied as a perfect horror short subject by admiring film fans. Director Fred Walton pulls out all the stops to make this scenario effective, as a babysitter named Jill copes with a true horror: a killer inside the house. Walton begins well by establishing Jill's isolation, filming her in long shot as she talks to friends on the phone, unaware of the horror to come. Then, Walton teases us with "jolts" in the night, little noises that put the audience on edge (such as the refrigerator ice-maker kicking in). These noises serve not only to jar the audience, they remind viewers that Jill is a stranger in this house. She is not knowledgeable about the territory because she has never been here before. The strange, unexpected sounds reinforce this notion.

Walton then decorates his introductory sequence with many close-ups of common household items: lamps, phones, the chain-lock, the front door, the fireplace, a clock, and so forth. It is clear that he is establishing the battleground, making us familiar with the details of Jill's new environment. Yet he is doing something else as well, something very important. By cutting to all these various insert shots of house decorations and the like, Walton is interrupting the cinematic flow of time and space. Instead of a long immaculate master shot (which suggests continuity and fluidity), these large close-ups are constantly cut into the picture, and the frequency of these edits quickly develops an unnerving rhythm. In other words, the cuts keep the audience slightly on edge, and the pacing fast. This kind of editing affects an audience in a specific way; it makes them nervous, on guard, because their sense of time and space has been compromised.

Then the phone calls begin. Slowly at first, and then quicker, and the audience's tension grows. Notice how in this segment of the opening sequence the close-up insert shots come more frequently, and quicker. It's as if the house itself is playing a trick on Jill. Walton also makes the most of his long shots as his camera notes that certain areas of the household (including the living room) are dark, unlit. This fosters the notion that there is something present there, hiding. *Waiting.*

Thematically, this scene also works splendidly because Jill makes all the right moves to survive, yet is actually endangering herself in the process. She locks the front door (in close-up), and so on, but the killer is already *inside* the house. In essence, she is putting up impediments for herself if she hopes to escape quickly, and the close-ups reinforce this notion. The audience is one step ahead, contemplating the nearest route to escape.

Long shots, compositions balanced in light and dark, periodic inserts, extreme close-ups of everyday house accouterments, and a scenario of ever-escalating discomfort result in a scene that builds to a fever pitch. By the time of the most terrifying telephone exchange (“Can you see me?”/“Yes”; “What do you want?”/“Your blood all over me!”), the audience is roped in, completely at the director’s mercy.

It’s a textbook case of cutting and lighting working to support a powerful narrative, and it is, without a doubt, the high point of *When a Stranger Calls*. After this sequence ends, the film degenerates into something of a routine thriller. Though it is rewarding that the film chooses to explore the notion of a serial killer as a pitiful loner, unable to connect with people, it seems a mistake to turn the faceless “voice” on the telephone into such an identifiable—and even pitiable—human being. The fear of the opening sequence is that someone unknown—“the stranger” of the title—is inside your house, waiting to do you harm. The film doesn’t sustain that theme, but instead determines to chart Duncan’s degeneration and plight in an uncaring society. He’s a ticking bomb waiting to go off, but one also feels sorry for the guy. Such feelings of empathy produce the opposite of horror and fear; they create identification.

None of this examination is meant to suggest that *When a Stranger Calls* is not a good or exciting thriller. It’s both, but the opening scene is exemplary, and the follow-up is a letdown by comparison. Still, there are some nice touches worth mentioning. For instance, Colleen Dewhurst’s character is pursued walking home from Torchy’s twice in the film. The first time, she is pursued by Duncan, and we know that a stranger is watching. Again, director Walton makes the most of long shots, highlighting Dewhurst’s isolation at night, even in a busy city.

More interesting, however is that Walton re-stages this suspense sequence a second time, with Dewhurst again being pursued, this time by Clifford (Charles Durning). This fits well into the film's notion of role reversal. As the picture unspools, Duncan becomes more and more human (more identifiable), and Clifford becomes harder and more obsessed, thus less identifiable. In both cases, someone is stalking Dewhurst for his own purpose, and this sequence seems to indicate that Clifford's and Duncan's roles could be switched with very little difficulty.

Besides its amazing opening sequence, one of the most rewarding facets of *When a Stranger Calls* is that it concerns grown-ups, not acne cases. The horror is outside the over-utilized teenager venue, despite the opening gambit with the babysitter, and that differentiates it from a pack that includes *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Prom Night* (1980). It's also nice from a structural standpoint that the film chooses to culminate where it began, with the beleaguered sitter (Kane) all grown up and facing the murderous Duncan one last time. That conclusion gives the film a sort of book end structure, and a nice cyclical feel.

Sometimes films outlive their detractors, and that is certainly the case with *When a Stranger Calls*, a film that received almost no positive critical attention at the time of its release. As proof of its quality and enduring power, one only need to mention the phrase "*Have you checked the children*" at a party. That turn of words has become part of the American pop culture lexicon, and the story of a killer already "inside the house" is one that has gone into the hallowed territory of urban legend. That elevation to such revered status is a testament to *When a Stranger Calls*' fine attention to detail, and to one of the best opening acts ever featured in a horror film.

LEGACY: A sequel starring Carol Kane and Charles Durning aired on cable in 1993, entitled *When a Stranger Calls Back*.

***Zombie* (1979) * * ***

Critical Reception

“Ludicrous, gut churning zombie flick, wholly typical of its director’s output and much cut outside his home country. A must for gore hounds.”—Howard Maxford, *The A to Z of Horror Films*, Indiana University Press, 1997, page 298.

“Like all of Fulci’s oeuvre, the movie is a powerful meditation on how to wreak unspeakably gruesome damage on the human body....”—David Everitt and Harold Schechter, *The Manly Movie Guide*, Boulevard Books, 1997, page 179.

“...incompetent Italian borrowing of ... *Night of the Living Dead*.... The opening, a board adrift in New York with its echoes of *Nosferatu* (1922), is fine ... but ... the horrors become too predictable, as is the tired direction of Fulci.—Phil Hardy, *The Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction*, 1984, page 355.

Cast & Crew

CAST: Tisa Farrow (Ann Bowles); Ian McCulloch (Peter West); Richard Johnson (Dr. Menard); Al Cliver (Brian); Aretta Gay, Stefania D’Amario, Olga Karlatos.

CREW: Distributed on Video by Magnum Entertainment. Jerry Gross Presents *Zombie*. *Written by:* Elisa Brigant. *Special Effects and Make-up:* Gianetto De Rossi. *Production Designer:* Walter Patriarca. *Music:* Fabio Frizzi, Georgio Tucci. *Production Manager:* Antonio Mazza. *Unit Managers:* Walter Massi, Tullio Lullo. *Editor:* Vincenzo Tomassi. *Director of Photography:* Sergio Salvati. *Produced by:* Ugo Tucci, and Fabrizio DeAngelis for Variety Film. *Directed by:* Lucio Fulci. *Re-recording:* Fino Roma, for Cinitalia Rome. *Dubbing Editor:* Nick Alexander. *Underwater Photography:* Ramon Bravo. *With Collaboration by:* Pado Curfo. *Assistant Director:* Robert Giandella. *Camera Operator:* Franco Bruni.

Assistant Camera: Fabrizio Vicari. *Script Continuity:* Daniela Tonti. *Hairstylist:* Mirella Sforzen. *Make-up:* Maurizio Trani. *Set Dresser:* Carlo Ferri. Filmed on location and at Elios R.P.A. Studios. *M.P.A.A.*
Rating: Unrated. *Running Time:* 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: A sailboat loaded with corpses arrives in New York City's harbor, out of control. The Coast Guard intercepts the craft and finds a voracious zombie on board. One of the Coast Guard officers is killed during an attack, but the zombie is dispatched into the bay.

The sailboat soon causes a mystery. Where did it come from? Little is known, except that it belonged to the father of Anne Bowles, who often used it to sail the Caribbean. Reporter Peter West wants to know more, and investigates the strange arrival. He teams with Anne Bowles, who is concerned for her father's life, and together the duo sneak aboard the impounded boat. They discover a letter to Anne from her father, informing her that he has come down with a deadly disease on an isolated island near St. Thomas.

Determined to discover what really happened, Anne and Peter fly to St. Thomas and charter a boat run by two vacationers, Brian Peters and his wife Susan. Together, this foursome go out in search of Matul, an island rumored to be "cursed."

Meanwhile, things on the island are desperate. Dr. Menard, a European, has been trying to determine why the sick and dying on the island do not expire, but return as flesh-devouring zombies. So far he has learned little, and has been forced to shoot several colleagues and islanders to stop the plague. A bullet or blow to the head, Menard has discovered, is the only way to kill a zombie. Menard's wife is terribly frightened on this island of the damned, and her fears come to fruition when she is attacked, murdered, and ultimately eaten by zombies from the other side of Matul.

A deadly shark attack damages Brian and Susan's boat just as it nears Matul, and they are forced to go inland to repair the vessel. Once on land, Peter and Anne meet with Dr. Menard and he informs them of the terrible zombie plague. Not yet aware that his wife is dead, Menard asks the foursome to visit his wife up the road and

check on her progress. Though suspicious and fearful, Brian, Susan, Peter and Anne do as he asks and head eight miles into the dense jungle, where Menard's house stands. There they find a plethora of zombies feeding on his wife. Fleeing the house after their Land Rover vehicle is disabled, these four refugees make for Menard's hospital as zombies start to rise in greater numbers from a conquistador graveyard.

Susan is attacked and killed on the run home, leaving Brian, Anne and Peter to seek refuge in the church/hospital run by Menard. Zombies attack this sanctuary in full force and there is a final battle that Menard fails to survive. Fleeing the island after burning down the church/hospital (and the zombies with them), the survivors flee for the damaged boat offshore. En route, Brian is confronted by Susan, now a zombie, who bites a fleshy plug out of his arm. Peter kills the undead Susan, and tends to Brian with Anne. The three survivors of Matul attempt to return to civilization. As Brian gets sicker, he realizes that he will soon turn into a zombie, and Peter locks him in the ship's hold as a precaution.

The survivors of the zombie attack on Matul are in for a rude awakening when they turn on their radio: worldwide news authorities are reporting that the zombie plague is running rampant in New York City...

COMMENTARY: *Zombie* is a mad, mad, mad gore party, packed with death, destruction and disembowelment. Thematically, it's a big time rip-off of George Romero's zombie trilogy (or at least its first two parts), but Italian director Fulci intentionally leaves out the social commentary, humor and subtext about the decay and breakdown of society. Instead, he focuses solidly and relentlessly on body parts being ripped apart, making this a notable "spaghetti" horror film. Yet, there's no need to be snobbish about such things; horror movies can be fun even without socially redeeming values, and *Zombie* is like a whacked out gore gauntlet, challenging the viewer to keep up with its gallery of grotesqueries.

Attempting to outdo *Jaws*, there is a scene in the film in which a zombie bites a shark and kills it. That's fun in an absurd way. Then there is the disgusting set piece in which Menard's beautiful wife gets murdered (and then eaten). A zombie pulls her through a door,

and her eyeball gets punctured, in loving close-up, by a jutting splinter from the wooden door. Thankfully, the scene preceding this really disgusting death occurs, in the best tradition of such exploitative material, in a shower. Yes, horror fans will be happy to know that before dying in gruesome fashion, the gorgeous Ms. Menard reveals some flesh.

As one might expect from the title, the ingenuity of *Zombie* involves the zombies themselves, and the problems they create for the bland protagonists. Fulci dominates his picture with tight framing, so the audience can't see what the characters do without abrupt cinematic pans that successfully foster shock and surprise. The camera sometimes assumes the point of view of a ghoul coming up out of the ground, rising with the rising dead, as it were, and that's a novel visual approach to the resurrection of the dead. All in all, it's not badly done, and Fulci engineers his effects (like burning zombies) with skill. Even his dopey "surprise" ending works well because of what appears to be authentic location shooting (in NYC).

Watching *Zombie* can be a nostalgic (if thoroughly disgusting...) experience for those who love 1970s horror films. It re-creates the brutal cannibalistic sequences of the living dead movies, takes place on a remote island where there is a terrible secret (like 1977's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*), and with its conquistador zombies genuflects to 1972's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* and those terrifying Templar ghouls. It's like a tasty reminder of the decade as a whole, but garnished with Italian spices.

Having survived *Beyond the Door* (1975) intact, actor Richard Johnson returns in yet another over-the-top, gross Italian film, but *Zombie* offers the thespian a better role. Here, the actor who once starred in *The Haunting* looks physically and mentally tortured, and spends most of the film's running time shooting people in the head. He gives a subdued, anguish-filled performance in the middle of the chaos, and consequently Menard is the most interesting personality in the film.

As for lead Tisa Farrow, she seems particularly glazed...

Hampered by poor dubbing, the American version of *Zombie* is only barely comprehensible at times. But a picture is worth a thousand

words. And a blood-soaked picture filled with worm-infested zombies has got to be worth at least one thousand and one words, even without Romero's taste and intelligence in the mix.

Conclusion

In some ways, the 1970s never really ended. They've merely been interrupted by intervening decades. It's amazing to think just how much America's millennial-era life could be considered a sequel to the disco decade. In 1974, we got *The Nixon Impeachment*; in 1999 it was *Impeachment Two: The Clinton Saga*. In 1974, we got the *Energy Crisis*; in 2001 we get *Energy Crisis II: Rolling Blackouts*. In 1973–74 we had *Watergate*; ever since we've seen a plethora of spin-offs (including *Iran-Contra-Gate*, *Whitewater*, *Travelgate*, *Pardongate*, etc.).

All the old bugaboos are back too, and some have gotten worse. Cloning has become a reality (applause, please, for *The Clonus Horror...*), scientists have charted the human genome (more applause for *Embryo* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*), and other scientific advances have left the uneasy feeling that “science has gone awry.”

Animals may not have revolted on us, but outbreaks of mad cow disease and the like certainly give new meaning to the popular 1970s “revenge of nature” sub-genre. Can the malevolent bunnies of *Night of the Lepus* be far behind?

Race issues are still with us: the 1990s gave the world two significant black horror warriors: Eddie Murphy as *A Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995), and Wesley Snipes as the vampire hunter *Blade* (1998)—sons of *Blacula*, both. How about a comedy remake of *The Thing with Two Heads*, but with Jim Carrey's head on Martin Lawrence's body?

An appropriate ad line for America in the 21st century might be “Evil Never Dies.” And neither do important issues such as conservation, racism, sexism, political reform, abortion and the rest. We thought we escaped these 1970s perils, but “*they're baaaaaaaaaack!*”

A person awakening in 2001 after 20 years of suspended animation

would experience déjà vu at the multiplexes. The hot horror hit of the year 2000 was, after all, a rerelease of a seventies movie: *The Exorcist: The Version You Never Saw*. Bogeyman Michael Myers has returned recently (in 1998) for the sixth sequel to *Halloween*, with more to come. Other '70s horror hits such as *See No Evil*, *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires*, *Play Misty for Me*, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *The Wicker Man* and *Westworld* have all been announced as "remakes" on upcoming production slates too. Call it '70s horror nostalgia or even creative bankruptcy if you wish, but whatever the name, it's apparently here to stay. Why? Because disco is *not* dead, and the '70s were ahead of their time. People were confronting terrors both futuristic and universal in the seventies, and reality has finally caught up. Take the energy crisis of 2001: We faced this fear briefly in the '70s, went back blissfully to our gas guzzlers in the '80s and our SUVs in the '90s and now, in the tradition of all good horror sequels, it's time to pay the piper.



In the 1980s, Michael Myers returned to haunt Jamie Lee Curtis and Donald Pleasence (pictured) in *Halloween II* (1981).

Seventies horror is still with us in so many ways. Directors Wes Craven, Steven Spielberg, David Cronenberg, John Carpenter, Tobe

Hooper, George Romero, Ridley Scott, and Brian DePalma all rose to prominence in the 1970s, and, impressively, are still working in Hollywood today, many still in horror. Only now, some 25 (in some cases 30) years after their first films are they being recognized as artists with something meaningful to say in consistent and deep bodies of work. We've not heard the last of any of them. The "re-evaluations" will begin in earnest in the next decade, as Carpenter, Hooper, Scott, DePalma, Spielberg and Craven hit their sixties.



The *Alien* series also survived the seventies, though Sigourney Weaver's Ripley (pictured) didn't survive her third encounter with the xenomorph (1992's *Alien³*).

The home video market and the advent of the DVD collectors' format will continue to assure that '70s classics are not forgotten. The hunger for new releases, like a vampire's thirst for blood, means that even the most obscure of 1970s horror hits will be exhumed for another stab at success. Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive*, David Cronenberg's *Shivers*, and a slew of lesser-known films (such as the *oeuvre* of the late William Girdler) are suddenly finding a curious—and educated—audience they never had in the local drive-ins of the '70s, and are being viewed in historical and artistic

contexts.

This text began its journey with the axiom that art reflects life. Another truth is that, eventually, art outlives context. In the years ahead, there will be fewer of us around on this spinning ball of dirt who remember, first-hand, the events of the 1970s. President Nixon, Watergate, the Vietnam War, “Whip Inflation Now” buttons, the incident at Three Mile Island, and the hostages in Iran will become remote events for study in books (or on computers). But the horror movies of this most unusual of decades will be the perfect time capsule to explore those things that scared us most. The spirit of '76 may be buried, but in a hundred years, historians will be studying *The Exorcist*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Halloween*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* to discern who Americans really were in one of the last decades of the 20th century. Our “horrific” art, our ghoulish entertainment, will be their guidepost to understanding.

Appendix A: Horror Film Conventions of the 1970s

As in any decade, some popular ideas/clichés/stories repeated over and over in the decade of Watergate and the energy crisis. Thus there were imitations of *Jaws*, of *The Exorcist*, and more animals ran amuck than on a Fox TV special. Below are some of the most common horror conventions of the 1970s, in no particular order. To be included on the list, the cliché or convention must have recurred at least three times in the decade.

I. Vampires

The '70s was the decade for vampires, offering new spins on old legends like Dracula, as well as more modern bloodsuckers like Yorga, Blacula and Barnabas Collins.

1. Dracula (Christopher Lee) in *El Conde Dracula* and Hammer's Drac Pack (*Scars of Dracula* [1970]; *Dracula 1972 AD*; *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* [1973])
2. Mircalla/Carmilla Karnstein (Ingrid Pitt, Yutte Stanesgaard, and Katya Wyeth respectively) in *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1970), and *Twins of Evil* (1971).
3. The Countess Elizabeth Bathory (Daphne Seyrig and Ingrid Pitt) in *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) and *Countess Dracula* (1971)
4. Blacula (William Marshall) in *Blacula* (1972) and *Scream, Blacula Scream!* (1973)
5. Yorga (Robert Quarry) in *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and *Return of Count Yorga* (1971)
6. Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid) in *House of Dark Shadows* (1970)
7. The townspeople of *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* (1971)
8. The denizens of *Vampire Circus* (1972)
9. Dracula (Udo Kier) in *Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974)

10. Martin (John Amplas) in *Martin* (1976)
11. Count Dracula (Klaus Kinski) in *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979)
12. Dracula (Frank Langella) in *Dracula* (1979)

II. Bad Seeds

Wherein children are the focal points for evil and/or terror, usually of the supernatural (demonic!) variety.

1. Satan's brood in *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971)
2. Chris and Martin Udvarnoky in *The Other* (1972)
3. Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* (1973)
4. Rick Baker's Mutant babies in *It's Alive* (1973)
5. Carol Speed in *Abby* (1974)
6. Harvey Stephens in *Omen* (1976)
7. Paula Sheppard in *Alice, Sweet Alice* (1977)
8. Susan Swift in *Audrey Rose* (1977)
9. Jonathan Scott Taylor in *Damien—Omen II* (1978)

III. Wrong Turn (The Vacation Trip Gone Bad)

Getting lost on vacation is a detour into pure terror. Sometimes the protagonists are on bikes, sometimes on trains, in canoes, or yachts, and sometimes even aboard recreational vehicles ... but whatever they're driving or riding, they find horror.

1. *And Soon the Darkness* (1970)
2. *Shock Waves* (1970)
3. *Brotherhood of Satan* (1971)
4. *Deliverance* (1972)
5. *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972)
6. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)
7. *Race with the Devil* (1975)
8. *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)
9. *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978)

10. *Savage Weekend* (1978)

11. *Tourist Trap* (1979)

IV. Revenge of Nature

Wherein animals attack the human world because of human mismanagement of the environment (via pollution, electrical accidents, pesticides, radiation, government tests, and the like).

1. *Frogs* (1972) (frogs, snakes, turtles, lizards, birds)

2. *Squirm* (1976) (worms)

3. *Day of the Animals* (1977) (bears, dogs, vultures, wildcats)

4. *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977) (spiders)

5. *Piranha* (1978) (piranhas)

6. *Prophecy* (1979) (?)

V. Revenge of Nature—Supersized! (Giant Animals Run Amok)

Wherein animals—grown abnormally large—attack the human world because of human mismanagement of the environment.

1. *Night of the Lepus* (1972) (rabbits)

2. *Empire of the Ants* (1977) (ants)

3. *Food of the Gods* (1976) (rats, chickens, bees)

4. *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975) (spiders)

VI. When Animals Attack

In seventies horror films, animals often went on the attack just because that was their nature, rather than responding specifically to human mismanagement of the ecosystem.

1. *Ben* (1972) (rats)

2. *Jaws* (1975) (great white shark)
3. *The Bug* (1975) (cockroaches)
4. *Grizzly* (1976) (grizzly bear)
5. *Orca* (1977) (killer whale)
6. *Night Creature* (1977) (panther)
7. *The Pack* (1977) (dogs)
8. *The Swarm* (1978) (killer bees)
9. *Nightwing* (1979) (vampire bats)

VII. When Animals Attack—At Their Master's Bidding!

In the 1970s, rotten human beings not only turned good animals evil (and gigantic!) through blatant environmental blunders, but also by very specific training.

1. *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971)
2. *Willard* (1971)
3. *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972)
4. *Stanley* (1972)
5. *Sssssss* (1973)

VIII. Future Fodder for *Mystery Science Theater 3000*

Mike and the 'Bots of *MST3K* delved deep into the '70s to find several films to amuse themselves with. Among them:

1. *Blood Waters of Dr. Z* (1971)
2. *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975)
3. *Track of the Moonbeast* (1976)
5. *Squirm* (1976)
6. *Laserblast* (1978)
7. *Parts: The Clonus Horror* (1979)

IX. Foreign Prestige

Wherein high-production, big-budget Hollywood horror pictures seek to add legitimacy to their “spooky” stories by filming on scenic foreign locations (*usually* the cradle of western civilization, the Middle East). A trend begun by *The Exorcist* in 1973.

1. *The Exorcist* (1973) (sequence in Iraq)
2. *The Omen* (1976) (sequence in Israel)
3. *Audrey Rose* (1977) (sequence in India)
4. *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) (sequence in Africa)
5. *Damien—Omen II* (1978) (sequence in Israel)

X. Horror Goes to School

Adolescence is a turbulent time in one’s life, and accordingly, many horror films of the 1970s are set in high schools, or private academies, or feature at least a few scenes in a school environment.

1. *Lust for a Vampire* (1970)
2. *Fear in the Night* (1973)
3. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975)
4. *Carrie* (1976)
5. *Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders* (1976)
6. *Jennifer* (1977)
7. *Suspiria* (1977)
8. *Halloween* (1978)
9. *The Fury* (1978)

XI. Blaxploitation

With the success of *Shaft* in the early 1970s, it was only natural that the black cinema turn to horror. And so it did, with African-American versions of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and even *The Exorcist*.

1. *Blacula* (1971)
2. *Scream, Blacula Scream!* (1972)
3. *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972)

4. *Blackenstein* (1973)
5. *Blood Couple* (1973)
6. *Abby* (1974)
7. *J.D.'s Revenge* (1976)

XII. Make Me Not a Monster

Wherein some kind of contamination (or experiment) turns a regular Joe into a terrifying (but inevitably low-budget) monster.

1. *Blackenstein* (1973)
2. *Ssssss* (1973)
3. *Track of the Moonbeast* (1976) (caused by lunar meteor)
4. *It Lives by Night* (1976) (caused by bat bite)
5. *Laserblast* (1978) (caused by alien locket)

XIII. The Library

Wherein a protagonist in search of the truth resorts to finding information on psychic powers, vampires, witchcraft, history and the like from that ultimate source of knowledge—the library. (This cliché has been replaced in '90s horror films [such as *I Know What You Did Last Summer*] by the Internet.)

1. *The Wicker Man* (1971)
2. *Blacula* (1972)
3. *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1972)
4. *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972)
5. *Scream, Blacula Scream!* (1973)
6. *Carrie* (1976)
7. *Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders* (1976)
8. *The Amityville Horror* (1979)

XIV. Hi, My Name Is

Wherein the title of a film is named after the main character; a popular '70s horror movie gimmick.

1. *Willard* (1971)
2. *Ben* (1972)
3. *Stanley* (1972)
4. *Abby* (1974)
5. *Carrie* (1976)
6. *Martin* (1976)
7. *Audrey Rose* (1977)
8. *Ruby* (1977)
9. *Jennifer* (1978)
10. *Patrick* (1978)

XV. The Paranormal Experience/Feature of...

Another '70s oddity in movie titles, wherein a paranormal event such as possession, resurrection or the like is coupled with a character's name.

1. *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1972)
2. *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975)
3. *The Haunting of Julia* (1976)
4. *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978)

XVI. Rape and Revenge

The ever-popular low-budget trend popularized by the '70s, in which one brutal act inspires an act of revenge, and then another, and then another, and so on, and so on...

1. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
2. *Straw Dogs* (1971)
3. *Deliverance* (1972)
4. *The Last House on the Left* (1972)
5. *Death Game* (1977)

6. *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)
7. *I Spit on Your Grave* (1979)

XVII. The Anthology

Anthology films (films featuring multiple stories) were very popular, especially during the early 1970s. Most of them came from England.

1. *Asylum* (1972)
2. *Tales from the Crypt* (1972)
3. *Tales That Witness Madness* (1973)
4. *From Beyond the Grave* (1973)
5. *Vault of Horror* (1973)

XVIII. Science Gone Awry

Wherein a doctor, scientist, or government pushes the limits of morality and knowledge to create an abomination (or abominations) that ultimately threatens him or his society.

1. *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1970)
2. *Scream and Scream Again* (1970)
3. *The Asphyx* (1972)
4. *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972)
5. *Westworld* (1972)
6. *Blackenstein* (1973)
7. *The Crazies* (1973)
8. *The Terminal Man* (1974)
9. *The Bug* (1975)
10. *Shivers* (1975)
11. *The Stepford Wives* (1975)
12. *Embryo* (1976)
13. *Demon Seed* (1977)
14. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977)
15. *Rabid* (1977)

16. *The Boys from Brazil* (1978)

17. *Coma* (1978)

XIX. Sequels! (Or '70s Franchises)

Horror films became mainstream for the first time in the 1970s, and it is only natural that many of the most popular would spawn sequels. Below is a list of the originals, and the sequels (if they premiered in the '70s).

1. *Blacula/Scream Blacula, Scream!*

2. *Willard/Ben*

3. *Count Yorga, Vampire/Return of Count Yorga*

4. *The Abominable Dr. Phibes/Dr. Phibes Rises Again*

5. *It's Alive/It Lives Again*

6. *The Exorcist/Exorcist II: The Heretic*

7. *Jaws/Jaws II*

8. *The Omen/Damien: The Omen II*

XX. Lesbian Horror

The seventies benefited from "the new freedom": film's liberty to depict "alternative" choices, and more explicit nudity. A direct result of the new freedom was that lesbian love scenes were added to horror films to spice 'em up.

1. *Lust for a Vampire* (1970)

2. *The Vampire Lovers* (1970)

3. *Daughters of Darkness* (1971)

4. *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972)

XXI. Zombies!

Thanks to the cult popularity of George Romero's 1967 zombie

picture, *Night of the Living Dead*, the undead became the most popular (and cheapest!) new movie monster of the 1970s.

1. *Shock Waves* (1970)
2. *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972)
3. *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972)
4. *The Dead Don't Die* (1974)
5. *Shivers* (1975)
6. *Shock Waves* (1976)
7. *Rabid* (1977)
8. *Dawn of the Dead* (1979)
9. *Zombie* (1979)

XXII. Stop-Motion Madness!

Wherein stop-motion animation is used to depict the monstrous threat, in the great tradition of Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen.

1. *Trog* (1970)
2. *Equinox* (1971)
3. *The Crater Lake Monster* (1977)
4. *Laserblast* (1978)
5. *Piranha* (1978) (briefly)
6. *The Day Time Ended* (1979)

XXIII. Satanism and Devil Worship

A particular favorite of the decade, there were devil/Satan movies aplenty in the 1970s, featuring demons, cults, and strange rites.

1. *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970)
2. *Asylum of Satan* (1971)
3. *Brotherhood of Satan* (1971)
4. *Daughters of Satan* (1972)
5. *The Pyx* (1973)
6. *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973)

7. *The Devil's Rain* (1975)
8. *Race with the Devil* (1975)
9. *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976)

XXIV. Cannibalism (Or, You Are What They Eat)

A tasty topic ... cannibalism was the horror *du jour* of several 1970s horror films.

1. *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* (1972)
2. *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974)
3. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)
4. *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)
5. *Bloodsucking Freaks* (1977)

XXV. Horror in an RV

The Winnebago as vehicle of terror...

1. *Night of the Lepus* (1972)
2. *Race with the Devil* (1975)
3. *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)

XXVI. Fish Stories

After *Jaws*, an awful lot of horror films featuring underwater life were made to exploit its popularity.

1. *Jaws* (1975)
2. *Orca* (1977) (okay, technically not a fish)
3. *Jaws II* (1978)
4. *Piranha* (1978)

XXVII. The Nuthouse

The mental sanatorium, a place of crazy people and dark medical secrets, is the opportune venue for horror, and the 1970s horror genre mirrored that by setting several pictures in asylums.

1. *Asylum of Satan* (1971)
2. *Asylum* (1972)
3. *I Dismember Mama* (1972)
4. *Don't Look in the Basement* (1973)
5. *Silent Night, Bloody Night* (1973)
6. *Tales That Witness Madness* (1973)

XXVIII. Witchhunts

Ever popular for the inquisition's violent manners of extracting a confession, the witchhunt was another popular horror film conceit in the '70s.

1. *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970)
2. *Cry of the Banshee* (1970)
3. *The Devils* (1971)
4. *Mark of the Devil* (1972)

XIX. Possession

Although most people believe *The Exorcist* spawned the cinema's fascination with the topic of possession, there were actually several films in the '70s before Friedkin's which dealt with the topic, as well as those famous for imitating the pea soup-spewing effects of *The Exorcist*.

1. *Asylum of Satan* (1971)
2. *Brotherhood of Satan* (1971)
3. *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971)
4. *Daughters of Satan* (1972)

5. *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1972)
6. *The Exorcist* (1973)
7. *Abby* (1974)
8. *Beyond the Door* (1975)
9. *J.D.'s Revenge* (1976)
10. *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977)
11. *Ruby* (1977)
12. *The Manitou* (1978)

XXX. Germs

The idea of alien germs, or germ warfare, also found outlet in '70s pictures.

1. *The Andromeda Strain* (1971)
2. *The Omega Man* (1971)
3. *The Crazies* (1973)

XXXI. Haunted Houses

Long favored by Hollywood, this genre was also recycled (with improved special effects) for the seventies.

1. *Night of Dark Shadows* (1971)
2. *The Legend of Hell House* (1973)
3. *Burnt Offerings* (1976)
4. *The Amityville Horror* (1979)

XXXII. Bad Dogs

Dogs (sometimes referred to as hell hounds) have become the favorite pet of the Devil—at least they were in 1970s horror films.

1. *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971)

2. *Daughters of Satan* (1972)
3. *Embryo* (1976)
4. *The Omen* (1976)
5. *The Pack* (1977)

XXXIII. A Crime in the Past

Wherein a film opens with a crime (usually a murder) in years past, and then flashes forward to the present, to see how that crime affects the here and now.

1. *Dear Dead Delilah* (1972) (crime in 1943)
2. *J.D.'s Revenge* (1976) (crime in 1942)
3. *Obsession* (1976) (crime in 1959)
4. *Halloween* (1978) (crime in 1963)

XXXIV. Psycho-Killers

Since Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a favorite villain in the horror film has been the psychotic lunatic—the serial/psycho-killer. That cliché also found new life in the 1970s.

1. *And Soon the Darkness* (1970)
2. *The Night Visitor* (1970)
3. *Carnival of Blood* (1971)
4. *Frenzy* (1972)
5. *I Dismember Mama* (1972)
6. *Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders* (1976)
7. *Haunts* (1976)
8. *Schizo* (1976)
9. *The Town that Dreaded Sundown* (1976)
10. *Alice, Sweet Alice* (1977)
11. *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978)
12. *Halloween* (1978)
13. *Savage Weekend* (1978)
14. *When a Stranger Calls* (1979)

XXXV. Martial Law

A loss of the freedoms we value is perhaps the ultimate terror, and a facet of several 1970s horror pictures.

1. *The Crazies* (1973)
2. *Rabid* (1976)
3. *Day of the Animals* (1977)

XXXVI. Exorcisms Performed

Exorcisms were performed regularly in 1970s horror flicks.

1. *The Exorcist* (1973)
2. *Abby* (1974)
3. *Beyond the Door* (1975)
4. *Martin* (1976)
5. *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977)
6. *Ruby* (1977)
7. *The Manitou* (1978)

XXXVII. He/She Can't Be Alive, Because I Killed Him/Her (or Revenge from Beyond the Grave)

Wherein the dead (or believed dead) return to wreak revenge upon the guilty living.

1. *Crucible of Horror* (1971)
2. *Tales from the Crypt* (1972)
3. *Dominique* (1978)

XXXVIII. The Next Hitchcock?

All of the following 1970s directors have, at one point or another, been described by critics and the press as the next Hitchcock in their approach to film.

1. Brian De Palma
2. John Carpenter
3. George Romero
4. Richard Franklin

XXXIX. You've Come a Long Way Baby

Wherein women's rights are the core issue of a horror flick.

1. *Jack's Wife* (1971)
2. *The Stepford Wives* (1974)
3. *Death Game* (1977)
4. *Demon Seed*

XL. Hospital Horror

Wherein a facility that should save lives instead becomes a place of stark, medical terror!

1. *Scream and Scream Again* (1970)
2. *The Terminal Man* (1974)
3. *Rabid* (1976)
4. *Coma* (1978)
5. *The Manitou* (1978)
6. *Patrick* (1978)

Appendix B: The 1970s Horror Hall of Fame

In the 1970s, a horror movie fan could be pretty sure he'd see a familiar face or two when visiting the local cinema. Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and Vincent Price were the big three of the decade, of course, but there are many other performers who made it a regular occupation to appear in horror pictures. To be included in the 1970s Horror Hall of Fame, a performer had to appear in at least three films during the decade.

Michael Ansara *Dear Dead Delilah* (1972), *It's Alive* (1973), *Day of the Animals* (1977), *The Manitou* (1978)

R. G. Armstrong *Race with the Devil* (1975), *The Car* (1977), *The Pack* (1977)

James Brolin *Westworld* (1972), *The Car* (1977), *The Amityville Horror* (1979)

John Carradine *Shock Waves* (1970), *Silent Night, Bloody Night* (1973), *The Sentinel* (1977)

Joan Collins *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), *Fear in the Night* (1973), *Empire of the Ants* (1977)

Peter Cushing *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1970), *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *Shock Waves* (1970), *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Twins of Evil* (1971), *Asylum* (1972), *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), *The Creeping Flesh* (1972), *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972), *Dracula AD 1972* (1972), *Horror Express* (1972), *From Beyond the Grave* (1973), *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973), *The Legend of 7 Golden Vampires* (1974), *The Ghoul* (1974), *Legend of the Werewolf* (1975)

Bradford Dillman *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), *The Bug* (1975), *Piranha* (1978), *The Swarm* (1978)

Charles Durning *Sisters* (1973), *The Fury* (1978), *When A Stranger Calls* (1979)

Pamela Franklin *And Soon the Darkness* (1970), *The Legend of Hell House* (1973), *Food of the Gods* (1976)

Michael Gough *Trog* (1970), *Crucible of Horror* (1971), *Legend of Hell House* (1973), *The Boys From Brazil* (1978)

Murray Hamilton *Jaws* (1975), *Jaws II* (1978), *The Amityville Horror* (1979)

Ian Hendry *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), *Theatre of Blood* (1973), *Damien—Omen II* (1978)

John Karlen *House of Dark Shadows* (1970), *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), *Night of Dark Shadows* (1971)

Margot Kidder *Sisters* (1973), *Black Christmas* (1974), *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975), *The Amityville Horror* (1979)

Udo Kier *Mark of the Devil* (1972), *Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974), *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* (1974), *Suspiria* (1976)

Christopher Lee *El Conde Dracula* (1970), *Scars of Dracula* (1970), *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *The Wicker Man* (1971), *Dracula AD 1972* (1972), *Horror Express* (1972), *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973), *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976)

Herbert Lom *El Conde Dracula* (1970), *Asylum* (1972), *Mark of the Devil* (1972)

William Marshall *Blacula* (1972), *Scream Blacula Scream!*, (1973), *Abby* (1974),

Strother Martin *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Sssssss* (1973), *Nightwing* (1979)

Christopher Matthews *Scars of Dracula* (1970), *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *See No Evil* (1971)

Roddy McDowall *The Legend of Hell House* (1974), *Embryo* (1976),

Laserblast (1978)

Burgess Meredith *Burnt Offerings* (1976), *The Sentinel* (1977), *Magic* (1978), *The Manitou* (1978)

Ray Milland *Frogs* (1972), *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972), *The Dead Don't Die* (1974)

Caroline Munro *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1970), *Dracula AD 1972* (1972), *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972)

Roger Perry *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970), *Return of Count Yorga* (1972), *The Thing With Two Heads* (1972)

Donald Pleasence *From Beyond the Grave* (1973), *Tales That Witness Madness* (1973), *Night Creature* (1977), *Halloween* (1978), *Dracula* (1979)

Vincent Price *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971), *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972), *Theatre of Blood* (1973)

Robert Quarry *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970), *Return of Count Yorga* (1972), *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972)

Max Von Sydow *The Night Visitor* (1971), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977)

David Warner *Straw Dogs* (1971), *From Beyond the Grave* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), *Nightwing* (1979)

Stuart Whitman *Night of the Lepus* (1972), *Eaten Alive* (1976), *Ruby* (1977), *The Swarm* (1978)

Richard Widmark *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976), *Coma* (1978), *The Swarm* (1978)

Keenan Wynn *Orca* (1977), *Laserblast* (1978), *Piranha* (1978), *The Clonus Horror* (1979)

Appendix C: Memorable Movie Ad Lines

In many cases in the 1970s, the advertising to promote a horror film was verbally more inspired than the film itself. Below is a list of some choice ad lines from a very inventive decade.

“Barnabas Collins, vampire, takes a bride in a bizarre act of unnatural lust.”—*House of Dark Shadows* (1970)

“Love slaves of Satan tortured to blood-dripping death.”—*Asylum of Satan* (1971)

“These are the Daughters of Darkness.... They are waiting for you—They thrive on blood.”—*Daughters of Darkness* (1971)

“Warning! Blood Action by the Gallon! See: A Man’s head crushed in the giant bear trap! See: Shotgun murders close-up! See: Gang Attack on the Young Bride! See: Scalding vinegar sear the eyes!”—*Straw Dogs* (1971)

“Where your nightmares end, *Willard* begins.”—*Willard* (1971)

“The ultimate in human agony! Special notice! The management hereby disclaims any responsibility for patrons who suffer: (A) Apoplectic strokes; (B) Cerebral hemorrhages; (C) Cardiac seizures; or (D) Fainting spells during the shockingly gruesome scenes in this film.”—*Baron Blood* (1972)

“Today the pond, tomorrow the world.”—*Frogs* (1972)

“THE HANDS OF JACK THE RIPPER LIVE AGAIN ... as his fiendish daughter kills again ... and again ... and again!”—*Hands of the Ripper* (1972)

“A Frenzy of Blood! Haunting Desires Seething in His Mind Lead to a Night of Ghastly Atrocities!”—*I Dismember Mama* (1972)

“To avoid fainting, keep repeating, it’s only a movie ... only a movie ... only a movie ... only a movie...”—*The Last House on the Left* (1972)

“The first film rated V for violence ... guaranteed to upset your stomach.”—*Mark of the Devil* (1972)

“How many eyes does horror have? How many times will terror strike?”—*Night of the Lepus* (1972)

“Holland, where is the baby?”—*The Other* (1972)

“If you believe, no explanation is necessary. If you don’t believe, no explanation is possible.”—*Possession of Joel Delaney* (1972)

“A Glimpse of Death & Horror.”—*Tales from the Crypt* (1972)

“Why are the good people dying?”—*The Crazies* (1973)

“She gave her body ... they took it ... for keeps!”—*The Pyx* (1973)

“The newest sound in terror.”—*Sssssss* (1973)

“Horror! Beyond your wildest imagination! Terror! To chill your Blood!”—*Vault of Horror* (1973)

“Abby doesn’t need a man anymore ... the Devil is her lover now!”—*Abby* (1974)

Hammer Horror! Dragon Thrills! The First Kung-Fu Horror Spectacular!—*The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires* (1974)

“Who will survive, and what will be left of them?”—*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

“If you liked *Young Frankenstein*, you’ll love *Old Dracula...*”—*Old Dracula* (1975)

“Something strange is happening in the town of Stepford. Where the men spend their nights doing something secret. And every woman acts like every man’s dream of the ‘perfect’ wife. Where a young woman watches the dream become a nightmare. And sees the nightmare engulf her best friend. And realizes that any moment, any second—her turn is coming.”—*The Stepford Wives* (1975)

“When was the last time you were *really* scared?”—*Deep Red: The Hatchet Murders* (1976)

“From Embryo to Woman in 4 and ∂ weeks.... Her name is Victoria—She has just been born at age 24. The perfect creation of science ... almost.”—*Embryo* (1976)

“18 Feet of gut-crunching, man-eating terror!”—*Grizzly* (1976)

“There is still only one King Kong.”—*King Kong* (1976)

“See it with someone you’re sure of...”—*Martin* (1976)

“You have been warned...”—*The Omen* (1976)

“When the left hand doesn’t know who the right hand is killing!!!”—*Schizo* (1976)

“What evil drives...”—*The Car* (1977)

“The lucky ones died first....”—*The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)

“YOU could be the next victim.”—*Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977)

“The night he came home.”—*Halloween* (1978)

“The seed is planted; terror grows...”—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978)

“Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...”—*Jaws II* (1978)

“Compared to this, Carrie was an angel!”—*Jennifer* (1978)

“Billy was a kid who got pushed around, and then he found the power...”—*Laserblast* (1978)

“In space, no one can hear you scream.”—*Alien* (1979)

“For God’s sake, get out!!”—*The Amityville Horror* (1979)

“When there’s no more room in Hell, the dead will walk the Earth.”—*Dawn of the Dead* (1979)

“We are going to eat you.”—*Zombie* (1979)

Appendix D: Then and Now—Recommended Viewing

If you are one of those people who does not believe the past affects the present, this appendix is proof to the contrary. Like a nightmare, the 1970s just won't go away ... at least not in our cineplexes. Below is a list of recommended viewing that reveals how 1970s film horror lived on in the 1990s and 2000.

First Watch—Then View

The Exorcist (1973)—*Stigmata* (1999), *Lost Souls* (2000)

Jaws (1975)—*Deep Blue Sea* (1999), *Halloween* (1978) *H20* (1998), *Scream* (1996), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *Urban Legend* (1997), *Scary Movie* (2000)

King Kong (1976)—*Godzilla* (1998)

Kingdom of the Spiders (1977)—*Arachnophobia* (1990)

Legend of Boggy Creek (1973)—*The Blair Witch Project* (1999)

Alien (1979)—*Mimic* (1997), *Alien Resurrection* (1997), *Pitch Black* (2000)

God Told Me To (1976)—*The X-Files: Fight the Future* (1998)

First Watch—Then View

The Omen (1976)—*Bless the Child* (2000), *Lost Souls* (2000)

El Conde Dracula (1970)—*Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992)

When A Stranger Calls (1979)—*When a Stranger Calls Back*

(1993), *Scream* (1996)

Blacula (1972)—*A Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995), *Blade* (1998)

The Crater Lake Monster (1977)—*Anaconda* (1997)

Bog (1978)—*Lake Placid* (1999)

The Andromeda Strain (1971)—*Outbreak* (1995)

A Clockwork Orange (1971)—*Natural Born Killers* (1994)

Westworld (1972)—*Jurassic Park* (1993)

Carrie (1976)—*The Rage: Carrie 2* (1999)

The Town That Dreaded Sundown (1976)—*The Bone Collector* (1999), *The Watcher* (2000)

The Island of Dr. Moreau (1977)—*The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996)

Nightwing (1979)—*Bats* (1999)

Coma (1978)—*Extreme Measures* (1996)

Frogs (1972)—*Magnolia* (1999)

Straw Dogs (1971)—*Fight Club* (2000)

Appendix E: The Best Horror Movies of the 1970s

Out of more than 200 films reviewed in this text, it's difficult to limit the choices to merely ten as "best representing the 1970s." Accordingly, the list below includes *fifteen* of the best genre films of the decade ... just to provide a little breathing room.

The number one selection, *The Exorcist*, will be no surprise to historians of the genre. Friedkin's film remains a brilliant meditation on the presence of real "evil" in our culture, and has yet to be outdone for pure visceral impact.

The number two selection may ruffle a few feathers. *Don't Look Now*, directed by Nicholas Roeg, is not one of the more popular or well-known entries among mainstream horror fans, but it certainly deserves to be because it so brilliantly (and horrifically) tackles the notion of fate. The film's final revelation, the appearance of the specter in the red slicker, is one of horror's most memorable images, and has become the stuff of legend in some circles, even referenced once on *The Simpsons*.

The remaining choices will more or less make sense when one remembers the dreads of the 1970s. *Jaws* represents the apex of the decade's "animal attack" sub-genre, *Halloween* is a terrifying psycho-thriller benefiting from a master filmmaker's sense of timing and pace, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Last House on the Left*, *Deliverance* and *Straw Dogs* are all powerful entries in the cutthroat "savage cinema." *Carrie*, of course, is a stylish paranormal thriller, and one that set off a rash of imitations, and both *Dawn of the Dead* and *Alien* irrevocably changed how the genre looked in the decade, opening a more explicit period in horror cinema. *The Stepford Wives* was so powerfully conceived that its very title has become cultural shorthand for a conservative, traditional matriarch. We all know what a Stepford wife is.

The Wicker Man, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* are personal favorites of this author, and represent '70s horror cinema at its most diverse. The first concerns trickery, the

second the inexplicable, and the third, paranoia. Each is a masterpiece in its own right.

1. *The Exorcist* (1973; dir: William Friedkin)
2. *Don't Look Now* (1973; dir: Nicholas Roeg)
3. *Jaws* (1975; dir: Steven Spielberg)
4. *Halloween* (1978; dir: John Carpenter)
5. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974; dir: Tobe Hooper)
6. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978; dir: Phil Kaufman)
7. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975; dir: Peter Weir)
8. *The Wicker Man* (1973; dir: Robin Hardy)
9. *Carrie* (1976; dir: Brian De Palma)
10. *Dawn of the Dead* (1979; dir: George Romero)
11. *Alien* (1979; dir: Ridley Scott)
12. *The Last House on the Left* (1972; Dir: Wes Craven)
13. *Deliverance* (1972; Dir: John Boorman)
14. *The Stepford Wives* (1975; dir: Bryan Forbes)
15. *Straw Dogs* (1971; dir: Sam Peckinpah)

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The Devil's Rain (film)

Dewherst, Colleen (actress)

Diabolique (remake; 1995)

Les Diaboliques (film)

Dickey, James (novelist)

Dillman, Bradford (actor)

Di Sesso, Moe (special effects technician; rat trainer)

Disturbing Behavior (film)

Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde (film)

Dr. Phibes Rises Again (film)

Dr. Who (TV series)

Dominique (film)

Donaggio, Pino (composer)

Donner, Clive (director)

Donner, Richard (director)

Don't Look in the Basement (film)

Don't Look Now (film)

Dotrice, Michele (actress)

Douglas, Kirk (actor)

Douglas, Michael (actor)

Dourif, Brad (actor)

Dracula (literary and movie character)

Dracula (1931 film)

Dracula (1979 film)

Dracula: Dead and Loving It (film)

Dracula A.D. 1972 (film)

Dracula Blows His Cool (film)

Dracula—Prince of Darkness (film)

Dracula Has Risen from the Grave (film)

Dracula Sucks (film)

Dracula's Dog (film)

Dracula's Widow (film)

Dressed to Kill (film)

Dreyfuss, Richard (actor)

Duel (TV film)

Dullea, Keir (actor)

Dunaway, Faye (actress)

The Dunwich Horror (film)

Durning, Charles (actor)

E.C. Comics

Earthquake (film)

Eastwood, Clint (actor)

Easy Rider (film)

Eaten Alive (film)

Ebert, Roger (film critic)

Edgerton, Earle (actor)

Ekland, Britt (actress)

Elliott, Denholm (actor)

Elliott, Sam (actor)

Embryo (film)

Empire of the Ants (film)

Englund, Robert (actor)

Equinox (film)

Escape from New York (film)

Escape from the Planet of the Apes (film)

Eure, Wesley (actor)

Evil Dead (film)

Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn (film)

Existenz (film)

The Exorcist (film)

The Exorcist: The Version You Never Saw (re-release)

The Exorcist II: The Heretic (film)

Exorcist III (film)

Eyes of Laura Mars (film)

Falk, Peter (actor)

Farris, John (director)

Farrow, Mia (actress)

Farrow, Tisa (actress)

Fatal Attraction (film)

Fear in the Night (film)

Ferdin, Pamelyn (child actress)

The Final Conflict (film)

Final Destination (film)

Finch, John (actor)

Findlay, Mike (director)

Finley, Bill (actor)

Fisher, Terence (director)

Flack, Roberta (musician)

Flaxman, Harvey (writer)

Fleischer, Richard (director)

Fletcher, Louise (actress)

The Fly (original film)

The Fly (1986 remake)

The Fog (film)

Food of the Gods (film)

Fonda, Peter (actor)

Forbes, Bryan (director)

Forbes-Robinson, John (actor)

Forrest, Frederic (actor)

Francis, Freddie (director)

Franco, Jess (director)

Frankenheimer, John (director)

Frankenstein (literary and movie character)

Frankenstein (film)

Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell (film)

Frankenstein Created Woman (film)

Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed (film)

Franklin, Pamela (actress)

Franklin, Richard (director)

Franz, Dennis (actor)

Frederick, Lynne (actress)

Frenzy (film)

Frid, Jonathan (actor)

Friday the 13th (film)

Friday the 13th: The Series (TV series)

Friedkin, William (director)

Fright Night (film)

Frogs (film)

From Beyond the Grave (film)

Frum, David (writer/historian)

Fuest, Robert (director)

Fulci, Lucio (director)

The Funhouse (film)

The Fury (film)

Futureworld (film)

Gaines, William (publisher, E.C. Comics)

Galaxy Quest (film)

Ganja & Hess

Gary, Lorraine (actress)

Geeson, Judy (actress)

General Hospital (TV series)

George, Christopher (actor)

George, Susan (actress)

The Ghost and the Darkness (film)

Ghosts of Mars (film)

The Ghoul (film)

The Giant Spider Invasion (film)

Giger, H.R. (special effects designer)

Gibson, Alan (director)

Gilbert, Stephen (writer)

Gilligan's Island (TV series)

Girdler, William (director)

Gladiator (film)

God Told Me To (film)

Godfrey, Derek (actor)

Godzilla (original film)

Godzilla (1998 remake)

Goldblum, Jeff (actor)

Goldman, William (writer)

Goldsmith, Jerry (composer)

Gordon, Bert I. (producer/director)

Gorillas in the Mist (film)

Gortner, Marjoe (actor)

Gossett, Lou (actor)

Gothard, Michael (actor)

Gottlieb, Carl (writer)

Gough, Michael (actor)

Graham, Billy (reverend)

Grainer, Ron (composer)

Gremlins (film)

Gremlins 2 (film)

Grier, Pam (actress)

Grier, Rosey (actor)

Grizzly (film)

Grizzly 2: The Predator (film)

Grodin, Charles (actor)

Guillermin, John (director)

Gunn, Bill (director)

H20: Halloween 20 Years Later (film)

Hagen, Uta (actress)

Haggard, Piers (director)

Hagman, Larry (writer/director)

Hale, Alan (actor)

Hale, Barbara (actress)

Hall, Grayson (actress)

Haller, Daniel (director)

Halloween (film)

Halloween II (film)

Halloween III: Season of the Witch (film)

Halloween IV: The Return of Michael Myers (film)

Halloween V: The Revenge of Michael Myers (film)

Halloween VI: The Curse of Michael Myers (film)

Halloween: Resurrection (film)

Hamilton, George (actor)

Hamilton, Murray (actor)

Hammer Studios

Hancock, John (director)

Hands of the Ripper (film)

Hardy, Robin (director)

Harper, Jessica (actress)

Harrington, Curtis (director)

Harris, Jack H. (producer)

Harris, Richard (actor)

Harryhausen, Ray (special effects creator)

Hartley, Mariette (actress)

Hatchet for a Honeymoon (film)

The Haunting (1963; film)

The Haunting (1999; remake)

The Haunting of Julia (film)

Haunts (film)

Hawks, Howard (director/producer)

HBO (cable network)

Hellman, Oliver (director)

Hellraiser (film)

Hendry, Ian (actor)

Henriksen, Lance (actor)

The Hephaestus Plague (novel)

Herrmann, Bernard (composer)

Herzog, Werner (director)

Hess, David (actor)

Hessler, Gordon (writer/director)

Heston, Charlton (actor)

Heyward, Louis M (producer)

Hickox, Douglas (director)

The Hidden (film)

Hill, Arthur (actor)

Hill, Debra (producer)

Hill, Walter (producer/director)

Hiller, Arthur (director)

The Hills Have Eyes (film)

The Hills Have Eyes 2 (film)

Hinds, William (producer)

Hitchcock, Alfred (the master of suspense/ director)

The Hitcher (film)

Hodges, Mike (director)

Hoffman, Dustin (actor)

Holden, William (actor)

Hook (film)

Hooker, Ted (director)

Hooper, Tobe (director)

Hopkins, Anthony (actor)

Horror Express (film)

The Horror of Dracula (film)

House of Dark Shadows (film)

House of Exorcism (film)

House of Wax (film)

House of Whiplash (film)

The House on Haunted Hill (film; 1959)

The House on Haunted Hill (remake, 2000)

The House That Dripped Blood (film)

The Howling (film)

Hudson, Rock (actor)

The Hunger (film)

Hunt, Barbara Leigh (actress)

Hurt, John (actor)

Hussein, Waris (director)

Hussey, Olivia (actress)

Hutchison, Ken (actor)

Hyman, Bob (actor)

I Dismember Mama (film)

I, Monster (film)

I Spit on Your Grave (film)

I Still Know What You Did Last Summer (film)

Iceman (film)

In Search of Dracula (film)

The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies (film)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956 film)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978 remake)

Irving, Amy (actress)

The Island of Dr. Moreau (film)

The Island of Dr. Moreau (1996 remake)

The Island of Lost Souls (film)

It, the Terror from Beyond Space (film)

It Lives Again (film)

It Lives by Night (film)

It's Alive (film)

It's Alive III: Island of the Alive (film)

J.D.'s Revenge (film)

Jack's Wife (film)

Jackson, Kate (actress)

Jackson, Michael (musician; King of Pop)

Jacob's Ladder (film)

Jaekel, Richard (actor)

Jaws (film)

Jaws II (film)

Jaws III (film)

Jaws: The Revenge (film)

Jennifer (film)

John Carpenter's Vampires (film)

Johnson, Ben (actor)

Johnson, Richard (actor)

Jones, Duane (actor)

Jones, Freddie (actor/director)

Jones, L.Q. (actor)

Jones, Tommy Lee (actor)

Jostin, Darwin (actor)

Jourdan, Louis (actor)

Journey to the Center of the Earth (novel)

Julia, Raul (actor)

Jurassic Park (film)

Jurgens, Curt (actor)

Kane, Carol (actress)

Karlen, John (actor)

Karloff, Boris (horror icon/actor)

Katt, William (actor)

Kaufman, Phillip (director)

Kay, Bernard (actor)

Keaton, Camille (actress)

Kelley, De Forest (actor)

Kelljan, Bob (director)

Kershner, Irvin (director)

Kidder, Margot (actress)

Kier, Udo (actor)

Killer Shrews (film)

King, Perry (actor)

King, Stephen (horror novelist)

King Kong (1930s film)

King Kong (1970s remake)

King Kong Lives (film)

Kingdom of the Spiders (film)

Kinski, Klaus (actor)

Kinski, Nastassia (actress)

Kirtman, Leonard (producer/director)

Kissinger, Charles (actor)

Kline, Richard B. (cinematographer)

Konvitz, Jeffrey (horror novelist)

Koontz, Dean (horror novelist)

Kotto, Yaphet (actor)

Kubrick, Stanley (director)

Kumel, Harry (director)

Lair of the White Worm (film)

Lake Placid (film)

Lampert, Zohra (actress)

Lancaster, Burt (actor)

Lanchester, Elsa (actress)

Land of the Lost (TV series)

The Land That Time Forgot (film)

Lange, Jessica (actress)

Langella, Frank (actor)

Lansing, Robert (actor)

Laserblast (film)

The Last House on the Left (film)

The Last Wave (film)

Laurie, Piper (actress)

Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part III (film)

Lee, Bruce (actor)

Lee, Christopher (horror icon/actor)

Le Fanu, Sheridan (writer)

The Legacy (film)

The Legend of Boggy Creek (film)

The Legend of Hell House (film)

Legend of Seven Golden Vampires (film)

Legend of the Werewolf (film)

Leggett, Paul (columnist)

Leiberman, Jeff (director)

Leigh, Janet (actress)

Leigh, Suzanna (actress)

Let's Scare Jessica to Death (film)

Levin, Ira (novelist)

Lifeforce (film)

Lincoln, Fred (actor)

Link (film)

Lisa and the Devil (film)

Lithgow, John (actor)

Lo Bianco, Tony (actor)

Locke, Sandra (actress)

Logan's Run (film)

Lom, Herbert (actor)

Loncraine, Richard (director)

Loomis, Nancy (actress)

The Lost Boys (film)

Lost in Space (film)

Love at First Bite (film)

Lovecraft, H.P. (horror author)

Lugosi, Bela (horror icon/actor)

Lumley, Joanna (actress)

Lupino, Ida

Lust for a Vampire (film)

Lynch, Richard (actor)

Macht, Stephen (actor)

MacLaine, Shirley (actress)

Macready, Michael (writer)

The Mad People

Madden, Lee (director)

Magee, Patrick (actor)

Magic (film)

Malone, Dorothy (actress)

The Man Who Haunted Himself (film)

Mancini, Henry (composer)

Mancuso, Nick (actor)

The Manitou (film)

Mann, Daniel (director)

Manos: The Hands of Fate (film)

Mark of the Devil (film)

Marshall, William (actor)

Martin (film)

Martin, Lucina (actress)

Martin, Strother (actor)

Mason, James (actor)

Mason, Marsha (actress)

Matheson, Richard (screenwriter, novelist, author)

The Matrix (film)

Matthews, Christopher (actor)

McCarthy, Kevin (actor)

McCowan, George (director)

McDowall, Roddy (actor)

McDowell, Malcolm (actor)

McEveety, Bernard (director)

McGoohan, Patrick (actor)

Melle, Gil (composer)

Menzies, Heather (actress)

The Mephisto Waltz (film)

Meredith, Burgess (actor)

Milford, Kim (actor)

Milland, Ray (actor)

Millennium (TV series)

Miller, Jason (actor)

Mills, Donna (actress)

Mills, Juliet (actress)

Mimic (film)

Mission: Impossible (TV series)

Mission Impossible 2 (film)

Mitchell, Cameron (actor)

Mitchell, Yvonne (actress)

Mommie Dearest (film)

Monsters (TV series)

Montgomery, Lee Harcourt (child actor)

Moore, Roger (actor)

Moorhead, Agnes (actress)

Morrissey, Paul (director)

Morse, Barry (actor)

Motel Hell (film)

Mother's Day (film)

Muldaur, Diana (actress)

Mulligan, Robert (director)

Munro, Caroline (actress)

Muren, Dennis (special effects technician)

Murnau, F.W. (director)

Murphy, Michael (actor)

My Bloody Valentine (film)

Mystery Science Theater 3000 (TV series)

Nation, Terry (writer)

Neame, Christopher (actor)

Nelligan, Kate (actress)

Nelson, Ralph (director)

Neufeld, Mace (producer)

The New Freedom (trend in movies)

New Year's Evil (film)

Newbrook, Peter (director)

Next! (film)

Nielson, Leslie (actor)

Nimoy, Leonard (actor)

Night Creature (film)

The Night Daniel Died (film)

Night of Dark Shadows (film)

Night of the Blood Beast (film)

Night of the Lepus (film)

Night of the Living Dead (film)

The Night Stalker (TV movie)

The Night Visitor (film)

A Nightmare on Elm Street (film)

A Nightmare on Elm Street IV: The Dream Master (film)

Nightwing (film)

Niven, David (actor)

Nixon, Richard

North by Northwest (film)

Nosferatu (1922 film)

Nosferatu (1979 film)

Nothing but the Night (film)

Oates, Warren (actor)

Obsession (film)

Old Dracula (film)

Oldman, Gary (actor)

Olivier, Laurence (actor)

Olson, James (actor)

The Omega Man (film)

The Omen (film)

Omen IV: The Awakening (TV movie)

O'Neal, Patrick (actor)

Orca (film)

Ormsby, Alan (actor)

Ormsby, Anya (actress)

The Other (film)

Outbreak (film)

The Outer Limits (TV series)

The Pack (film)

Padbury, Wendy (actress)

Page, Thomas (novelist)

Palance, Jack (actor)

The Parasite Murders

Parker, Lara (actress)

Parkins, Barbara (actress)

Pataki, Michael (actor)

Patrick (film)

Peck, Gregory (actor)

Peckinpah, Sam (director)

Pelikan, Lisa (actress)

The People That Time Forgot (film)

Persona (film)

Pertwee, Jon (actor)

Perry, Roger (actor)

Phantasm (film)

Phantasm II (film)

Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead (film)

Phantasm IV: Oblivion (film)

Phibes Resurrected (unproduced film)

Picnic at Hanging Rock (film)

Pierce, Charlie (director)

Piranha (film)

Pitch Black (film)

Pitt, Ingrid (horror icon/actress)

Planet of the Apes (film)

Play Misty for Me (film)

Pleasence, Donald (actor)

Plummer, Christopher (actor)

“Poetic Justice” (*Tales from the Crypt* episode)

Polanski, Roman (director)

Poltergeist (film)

Poor Albert and Little Annie

The Poseidon Adventure (film)

The Possession of Joel Delaney (film)

Post, Ted (director)

Predator (film)

Predator 2 (film)

Prentiss, Paula (actress)

Price, Vincent (horror icon/actor)

Prine, Andrew (actor)

The Prisoner (TV series)

Prom Night (film)

Prophecy (film)

Prowse, David (actor)

Psychic Killer (film)

Psycho (film)

psycho movies (movie trend)

The Pyx (film)

Quarry, Robert (actor)

Rabid (film)

Race with the Devil (film)

Raiders of the Lost Ark (film)

Raimi, Sam (director)

Raines, Christine (actress)

Ralson, Gilbert (writer)

Rambaldi, Carlo (special effects technician)

Rampling, Charlotte (actress)

rape and revenge (movie trend)

Ratman's Notebooks (novel)

Raven, Michael (actor)

Ray, Aldo (actor)

Rear Window (film)

Rebane, Bill (director)

Redgrave, Vanessa (actress)

Reed, Oliver (actor)

Rees, Angharad (actress)

Reid, Kate (actress)

Reincarnation of Peter Proud (film)

Renoir, Jean (director)

Return of Count Yorga (film)

Return of the Stepford Wives (TV movie)

Return to Boggy Creek (film)

Revenge of Frankenstein (film)

revenge of nature (movie trend)

Revill, Clive (actor)

Reynolds, Burt (actor)

Richardson, Ralph (actor)

Rigg, Diana (actress)

Rio Bravo (film)

Ritelis, Viktor (director)

Road Games (film)

road trip gone wrong (movie trend)

The Road Warrior (film)

Roberts, Tanya (actress)

Robertson, Cliff (actor)

Robinson, Chris (actor)

Rocky (film)

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (film)

Rod Serling's Night Gallery (TV series)

Roeg, Nicholas (director)

Roman, Ruth (actress)

Romero, George A. (writer/director)

Rosemary's Baby (film)

Rosenbaum, Ron (columnist)

Rosenberg, Max J. (producer)

Rosenberg, Stuart (director)

Rosenman, Leonard (composer)

Ross, Katharine (actress)

Ruby (film)

Russell, Ken (director)

Ryan, John (actor)

Salem's Lot (TV miniseries)

Sangster, Jimmy (writer/director)

Sarandon, Chris (actor)

Sargent, Dick (actor)

Sasdy, Peter (director)

The Satanic Rites of Dracula (film)

Saturday Night Fever (film)

savage cinema (movie trend)

Savage Weekend (film)

Savalas, Telly (actor)

Savini, Tom (actor/special effects creator)

Saxon, John (actor)

Scanners (film)

Scars of Dracula (film)

Scary Movie (film)

Schaffner, Franklin (director)

Scheider, Roy (actor)

Schizo (film)

Schmoeller, David J. (writer/director)

science goes awry (movie trend)

Scott, Kathryn Leigh (actress)

Scott, Ridley (director)

Scream (film)

Scream 2 (film)

Scream and Scream Again (film)

Scream Blacula Scream (film)

Scrimm, Angus (actor)

See No Evil (film)

Segal, George (actor)

Seizure (film)

Selleck, Tom (actor)

Seltzer, David (writer)

Sample, Lorenzo, Jr. (screenwriter)

The Sentinel (film)

The Serpent and the Rainbow (film)

The Seven Brothers Meet Dracula (film)

Shaffer, Anthony (writer)

Shaft (film)

Shatner, William (actor)

Shaw, Robert (actor)

Sheldon, David (writer)

Shen, Chan (actor)

Shields, Brooke (actress)

Shire, Talia (actress)

Shivers (film)

Shock Waves (film)

Shoop, Pamela Susan (actress)

Shriek of the Mutilated (film)

Siegel, Don (director)

Silence of the Lambs (film)

Silent Night, Bloody Night (film)

Silent Night, Deadly Night (film)

Silliphant, Sterling (writer)

Silverstein, Elliott (director)

Simmons, Jean (actress)

Simon, Adam (columnist)

Siskel, Gene (film critic)

Sisters (film)

The Sixth Sense (film)

Skerritt, Tom (actor)

Smith, Dick (special effects/make-up creator)

Soles, P.J. (actress)

Sommer, Elke

Son of Dracula (film)

South Park (TV series)

Soylent Green (film)

Space: 1999 (TV series)

Space Academy (TV series)

Spaceballs (film)

Spacek, Sissy (actress)

Spielberg, Steven (director)

Squirm (film)

Sssssss (film)

Stanley (film)

Stanton, Harry Dean (actor)

Star Trek (TV series)

Star Trek: The Motion Picture (film)

Star Trek: The Next Generation (TV series)

Star Wars (film)

Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (film)

Steel, Pippa (actress)

Steele, Barbara (actress)

Steiger, Rod (actor)

Stensgaard, Yutte (actress)

The Stepford Children (TV movie)

The Stepford Wives (film)

Stephens, Nancy (actress)

Stevens, Andrew (actor)

Stockwell, Dean (actor)

Stoker, Austin (actor)

Stoker, Bram (writer)

Stone, Oliver (director)

A Stranger in Our House (TV movie)

Strasberg, Susan (actress)

Straub, Peter (horror novelist)

Straw Dogs (film)

Streisand, Barbra (actress)

Striepeke, Dan (special effects artist/writer)

Stromberg, William (director)

Subotsky, Milton

Superbeast (film)

Superman: The Movie (film)

Suspiria (film)

Sutherland, Donald (actor)

The Swarm (film)

Swift, Susan (child actress)

Swit, Loretta (actress)

Sydow, Max Von (actor)

Sykes, Peter (director)

Syrig, Delphine (actress)

Szwarc, Jeannot (director)

Tales from the Crypt (film)

Tales from the Crypt (TV series)

Tales from the Darkside (TV series)

Tales That Witness Madness (film)

Taste the Blood of Dracula (film)

Taylor, Don (director)

Tentacles (film)

The Terminal Man (film)

The Terminator (film)

Terror at Red Wolf Inn (film)

Terror Train (film)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (film)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II (film)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre IV: The Next Generation (film)

Theatre of Blood (film)

Them! (film)

They Came from Within

They Live (film)

The Thing (1982; remake)

The Thing with Two Heads (film)

Thompson, J. Lee (director)

Three Mile Island

Three on a Meathook (film)

Tintorera—Tiger Shark (film)

To the Devil a Daughter (film)

Toho Studios

Tombs of the Blind Dead (film)

The Toolbox Murders (film)

Touch of Evil (film)

The Touch of Satan (film)

Tourist Trap (film)

The Towering Inferno (film)

Towers, Harry Allan (producer)

The Town That Dreaded Sundown (film)

Townsend, Bud (director)

Track of the Moonbeast (film)

Travolta, John (actor)

Traynor, Peter (director)

Tremors (film)

Trog (film)

Troughton, Patrick (actor)

Tryon, Thomas (novelist)

Turman, Glynn (actor)

The Twilight Zone (TV series)

Twins of Evil (film)

2001: A Space Odyssey (film)

Udvarnoky, Chris (child actor)

Udvarnoky, Martin (child actor)

Ullman, Liv (actress)

Unforgiven (film)

Universal Studios

Vadim, Roger (director)

Vampire Circus (film)

A Vampire in Brooklyn (film)

The Vampire Lovers (film)

Vampyres (film)

Van Ark, Joan (actress)

Vaughn, Robert (actor)

Vault of Horror (film)

Verne, Jules (writer)

Vertigo (film)

Videodrome (film)

Vietnam War

Village of the Damned (film; 1960)

Villechaize, Herve (actor)

The Virgin Spring (film)

Voight, Jon (actor)

Wait Until Dark (film)

Walker, Peter (director)

Walter, Jessica (actress)

Walters, Thorley (actor)

Walton, Fred (actor)

Ward, Simon (actor)

Warhol, Andy (pop artist)

Warner, David (actor)

Watergate Scandal

Wayne, David (actor)

Weaver, Dennis (actor)

Weaver, Fritz (actor)

Weaver, Sigourney (actress)

Weir, Peter (director)

Wells, Dawn (actress)

Wells, H.G. (author)

Wendkos Paul (director)

Werewolves on Wheels (film)

Wes Craven Presents Dracula 2000 (film)

Wes Craven Presents Mind Ripper (film)

Westworld (film)

When a Stranger Calls (film)

When a Stranger Calls Back (film)

White, Jan (actress)

White Zombie (film)

Whitman, Stuart (actor)

“Who Goes There” (short story)

Who Slew Auntie Roo? (film)

The Wicker Man (film)

Wicking, Christopher (writer)

Widmark, Richard (actor)

Wiederhorn, Ken (director)

The Wild Wild West (film)

Willard (film)

Williams, John (composer)

Williamson, Kevin (writer)

Winner, Michael (director)

Winters, Shelley (actress)

Wise, Robert (director)

The Wiz (film)

woman-oriented horror (movie trend)

Woodward, Edward (actor)

Woronov, Mary (actress)

Wymark, Patrick (actor)

Wynn, Keenan (actor)

The X-Files (TV series)

The X-Men (film)

Yablans, Irwin (producer)

York, Michael (actor)

Young, Burt (actor)

Zanuck, Richard (producer)

Zarchi, Meir (director)

Zerbe, Anthony (actor)

Zimmer, Laurie (actress)

Zombie (film)